

chroma

A QUEER LITERARY JOURNAL

Issue 4 - Spring 2006



stories poems art

A QUEER LITERARY JOURNAL **Chroma** Issue 4 - Spring 2006

PO Box 44655
London N16 0WQ
chroma@chromajournal.co.uk

SHAUN LEVIN

Editor

SARADHA SOOBRAYEN

Poetry Editor

DEEPNA SETHI

Publicity and Marketing

RAFFAELE TEO

Designer

COVER

Front: Del LaGrace Volcano, *Xxxxxxxx Xxxxxxxx*

Back: David Rothwell, *Magic & Miracles*

This issue is dedicated to Gerson Nason (1958-2006)

Chroma (ISSN 1744-7801) is published twice a year with the financial support of Arts Council England, London.

Subscriptions are £9.00 a year in the UK, £14.00 elsewhere (cheques payable to "Queer Writers and Poets").

©2006 Poetry, prose, artwork, and design rights return to the artists upon publication. No part of this publication may be duplicated without the permission of the individual artists or the editors.

Opinions expressed in *Chroma* are not necessarily those of the editors or of Queer Writers and Poets. Manuscripts submitted to *Chroma* must be original typescript or clear photocopies and will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. Please refer to the submission guidelines on the website before sending in work.

Letters to the editor are welcome. Please send them to the address above, or to editor@chromajournal.co.uk

02



www.chromajournal.co.uk

Chroma: Cinema

Stories

- 04 **Lukas Ridgeston:
A Cinematic Tribute**
MARC HOLLAND
- 10 **Confessions of a Badass
Femme**
MARIA MOJO
- 13 **This Time It's Personal**
DIANA COCKRILL
- 20 **Things You See in the Dark**
DREW PAYNE
- 24 **Family Video**
JOHN DIXON
- 27 **Boys Don't Cry**
MIMA SIMIC
- 32 **Shush**
VG LEE
- 36 **The Beautiful and Damned**
NIR COHEN
- 40 **Cheap Porn**
MICHAEL HYDE
- 45 **Rushes**
CHERRY SMYTH
- 46 **A Dream Deferred?**
INGE BLACKMAN
- 50 **Feature Wall**
SURAYA SIDHU SINGH
- 53 **Making Dracula**
JAY MERILL

Poetry

- 07 **An Argument She Won**
AOIFE MANNIX
- 09 **Fellini**
ROBERT SEATTER
- 12 ***The Underground Orchestra***
RIVER WOLTON
- 17 **The Iceberg Marlene**
JOHN McCULLOUGH
- 23 **The Rex**
CHAR MARCH
- 23 **Armchair Cowboy**
RADCLIFF GREGORY
- 29 **Woman**
SHARON MORRIS

- 43 **Happy Slapping**
ANDRA SIMONS
- 44 **Miklós Rózsa's Score for
*Double Indemnity***
TIM ROBERTSON
- 49 **Dental Examination**
SARAH SALWAY

Art

- 08 **Desire, Pleasure, Escape**
SINA SHAMSAVARI
- 10 **Untitled**
COLE CRUISE
- 18 **Untitled**
SARAH PUCILL
- 21 **Biker Boy**
PICSBYGAZ.COM
- 30 **Mannequin,
NYC, 2002**
PAUL HARTNETT/PYMCA
- 31 **Clubbers at Matthew
Glamorre's Kashpoint,
London, 2005**
PAUL HARTNETT/PYMCA
- 38 **Scenes Remembered**
ROBIN WHITMORE
- 52 **Untitled**
URIEL ORLOW
- 56 **Darkroom**
SHAUN DE WAAL
- 57 **Biographies**

03

Lukas Ridgeston: A Cinematic Tribute

Marc Holland



OF ALL the gay cinematic icons that have graced the film world, one individual towers above all others. He may not win mainstream accolades, nor are you likely to see his picture outside the local multiplex, but in terms of queer cinematography, he is unquestionably the greatest performer there has ever been. A man loved and lusted over by millions across the globe. A man whose name has become synonymous with masculine beauty and virility.

He is Juraj Vrzgula – or as he’s better known to the world, Lukas Ridgeston. A star in every sense of the word, who has literally become a legend in his own time. An actor whose presence on set is palpable, and around whom every other character seems to inexorably revolve. Above all, a man who will live on in the hearts and minds of his fans long after his acting career draws to a close.

To put it bluntly, Ridgeston is a cinematic demigod. An actor whose on-screen performances are much more an essential part of the ordinary gay man’s life than our other supposed icon, Judy Garland. He is a master of his trade who symbolises everything that we privately desire. A classy well-paid whore whose good-looks and wolf-like eyes would knock Julia Roberts’ *Pretty Woman* into a cocked hat any day of the week.

And to think that if the Cold War hadn’t ended when it did, none of us would have heard of him.

I first saw a photograph of the man in 1995 in a magazine called *Freshmen*, which I’d sneakily mail-ordered from a distributor in Manchester. Being young and naïve, this was my first introduction to a world I barely knew existed: an unspoken, almost deviant film culture that Barry Norman had never mentioned in *Film 95*. When the postman finally pushed the unmarked brown parcel through my door, I realised why.

Of all the graphic images on parade between those pages, those supplied by the film company *Bel Ami* secured my greatest attention. Most notably, this prime young starlet from Bratislava by the name of Lukas (originally Lucas) Ridgeston. Still only in his late teens, this soon-to-be gay idol was already head and shoulders above every other guy in the rag. It didn’t take long for his feature pages to suffer from understandable adhesion problems. I was jerking off three or four times a day looking at him – a condition, I have since discovered, has afflicted a whole army of guys ever since the director Georges Duroy first discovered Ridgeston in an unclassified German film in 1993.

Even in those early days, before his arguable prime, Ridgeston displayed the features that would

help him become the number one ball-drainer in history. With thick brown hair, deep cornflower eyes, high cheekbones and a becoming smile, he would surely have made it as a traditional model by means of his face alone. Adorning the posters of Hugo Boss or parading down the catwalks of Paris and New York. But added to all these assets was his undeniably gorgeous cock. He seemed to know instinctively that his eight solid uncircumcised inches of rampant meat were his unparalleled asset. Just looking at him, even back then, his eyes appeared to betray that certain knowledge of phallic superiority. As if he realised how much other men wanted him for his cock alone. A cock that – ever since its discovery by the *Bel Ami* studio – has fucked its way into gay cinematic superstardom.

No other film star – before or since – has ever affected me in quite this way, though at that stage I had still not seen him perform live. Photographs of this truly beautiful creature were one thing, but what I very quickly craved for was Ridgeston as a real actor. As a moving, living, breathing animal. As the boy next door, only in much more intimate and graphic detail.

Getting hold of such material in mid-nineties Britain was not easy. The authorities believed that young minds such as mine could be irreversibly corrupted by watching people have sex; viewing gay material was an even greater taboo. As a result, I had little option but to order material from abroad, hoping and praying customs would overlook a suspicious parcel stamped “Amsterdam.” Fortunately, the advent of the internet and the acknowledgement of more liberal European laws were already beginning to take effect; and whilst my precious copy of *Lukas’ Story* had clearly been opened at some stage in its journey, it eventually arrived on my doorstep safe and sound, ready for me to bung straight into my video-recorder, hands trembling and stomach churning in excitement.

I spunked for England that day. And for several weeks thereafter.

Lukas’ Story was the film that finally placed Ridgeston in the gay celestial firmament. Not just in my universe, but in the lives of millions of men across the globe.

Had Glasnost and Perestroika not occurred, had the Berlin Wall not fallen and the Eastern Block opened up its resources to the West, Ridgeston would probably have lived a life of complete and utter obscurity. Slaving away in some Communist factory or working the Slovak fields like generations before him. Such a thought is incredible now, but it

makes me realise how lucky we are to have discovered this horny, blue-eyed hunk. A young stud who, thanks to the fateful course of modern history, has made our lives brighter. More meaningful.

And it was in *Lukas' Story* – most notably in the final scene with Johan Paulik – that the actor firmly grasped the opportunity of immortality with both hands (and a hard cock) to prove, without a flicker of a doubt, that he was a cinematic force without equal. Ironically, he managed to achieve this honour in the presence of perhaps his greatest rival, Paulik himself, whose appearance on screen only adds to Ridgeston's own gild.

Here we witness, arguably for the very first time, the full extent of the young man's glory. A magnificence first suggested in his solo appearance in *Tender Strangers*, but never fully explored until this scene, when Paulik unzips Ridgeston's trousers and begins to provide the sort of oral adoration that we, as viewers, are left to dream about. Indeed, it was while watching this particular scene that I began to realise the sacred nature of that organ. An image of male potency that will undoubtedly remain with me for the rest of my days. What's more, Paulik himself seems to appreciate just how special this encounter is. Sucking and playing with its entire length like a new-found toy. Pulling back its arrogant foreskin to reveal the swollen mushroom contained beneath. Using his lips to fondle and caress the holy sacrament before finding a quiet alcove and allowing Ridgeston to thrust that cock up his tight ass, sitting on his lap and riding its length like his very existence depended on it.

This was a religious moment for me. A glimpse of revelation when the divine nature of Ridgeston seemed to leap off the screen and touch my young, impressionable soul. No less so than at the end of our hero's encounter when the sheer excitement of the handsome rendezvous begins to overwhelm him, and he pulls his cock out of Paulik's pert ass to erupt in what can only be described as typically magnificent fashion.

This, of course, is Ridgeston's greatest glory of all: the ability to produce not just copious amounts of spunk, but to do so with such velocity that it almost defies human ability.

A point first registered in *Tender Strangers*, when he squirts a particularly vengeful shot into his own eye – immediately after which he still manages to give a cheeky wink to the camera. But his money-shot in *Lukas' Story* is most definitely in a league of its own. At least twelve healthy pulses of cream bursting into the sticky, summer air, and performed with such alarming ease that I

couldn't help feeling a tad inadequate when I saw it for the first time. That said, it was a sight that turned me on like nothing else I'd seen before – which, of course, is all part of Ridgeston's magic. He is, as I have said, a man superior to us mere mortals; a veritable god whose aura hangs heavily on every scene he performs in. A superhuman who leaves us wanting more.

Ridgeston was once reported to have a secret method of ensuring the production of such spectacular climaxes: restraining from sexual activity for two weeks before filming. It's hard to regard such film-talk as anything other than an urban myth, especially given that I've yet to meet any guy of Ridgeston's age who can abstain for more than three days! Maybe I'm wrong – maybe earning ten thousand pounds a film is incentive enough to hold fire on the sex front. I suspect the truth is far less enigmatic than the actor would have us believe. Namely that he is *indeed* able to cum like a stallion with such tantalising naturalness that the rest of us can only watch in awe and admiration. We pay homage at his shrine by jerking off our meagre loads on an all-too-frequent basis.

The stars of adult films come and go, but Ridgeston's career unashamedly continued – his popularity spawned sequels to *Lukas' Story* in the nature of *Lukas' Story 2* and *Lukas' Story 3*. By this point, however, even Georges Duroy appeared to have acknowledged his protégé's greatness, and dared to provide him as the centrepiece of a thirty-man orgy he never actually takes part in.

Ridgeston is set apart from the rest of mankind like some fallen angel. His buffed muscles and toothy smile are a glimpse of the heaven promised to those who practice self-denial. Not that there ever seems any evidence of such temperance in his films. Yes, he might practice restraint outside the studio, but once in front of a camera Ridgeston becomes a veritable slut. A guy who naturally attracts men like bees to honey, and who uses his charisma and good looks to disarm them. He is the ultimate sexual danger to every guy he meets. A man who charms even the straightest stud into an all-male gang-bang or a blow-job in a disused barn before the other guy knows what's hit him. No son is safe from Lukas' eight inch pistol.

From obscure beginnings in provincial Slovakia, Ridgeston has developed into an international phenomenon. His horny, cocksure reputation, aided by the dramatic growth of the internet, has quickly propelled him into megastar status – a man who commands the attention of almost every

gay man on the planet. His film roles reflect this development, with later appearances only underscoring his messianic character. His image – and above all his cock – have become the nearest to perfection we are likely to see. Georges Duroy's clever manipulation behind the camera has ensured Ridgeston will remain the unrivalled pearl of his film company long after the hard-cocked, punk-shooting hero has donned his last rubber.

I couldn't even begin to hazard a guess as to how much cum my balls have produced in response to Ridgeston's on-screen antics, but one thing's for sure: he has been the one constant throughout my early life, and has seen me through more than one failed relationship. Like all true movie icons, he's been with me through thick and thin, ready to flick himself into life in the corner of my living room whenever I feel the need.

In the process, he has become as real to me as anyone I've ever met. His features – from the scar over his left eye to the blond down on his thighs – are as recognisable as those of any lover. This might serve as testimony to a deep-seated psychosis on my part – evidence that my life is lacking in some way. But I am quite sure that this is merely the effect all icons have on any of us. They gain an organic quality. A character. They develop as living people within our own imaginations, until we reach a level of engagement that makes us feel we know them personally. That is how I feel towards Lukas Ridgeston.

The very secretive nature of the relationship has somehow made the association even more special. The iconic status of this young cum-stud has given him an identity at odds with the real man in question. In my dreams, he speaks perfect English – when in fact *Bel Ami* insists (in reply to a letter I once wrote to Lukas) that Ridgeston cannot speak a word of the language. I also imagine him as a faithful lover, despite the fact that every flick he makes sees him fucking one guy after another. Above all, I feel he has a special relationship with me, and me alone – when reality tells me every other gay guy in the Western World feels the same way. But that, of course, is the magic of the man. The fact that he is somehow able to step out of the screen and touch our souls in ways no other film star has been able to do before or ever will again.

Ridgeston portrays the nearest thing to perfection we shall ever see. Not only in his physical form – which was once voted the most perfect body in adult-movie history – but also in the world he inhabits. A world of such unrivalled human

beauty and boundless fun that reality can only disappoint. A world where there are no consequences, and where guys are sucking and fucking on an almost perpetual basis. Most of all, a world where every man is gay and every day is engaged in thrusting hard cocks into open mouths and asses.

Overseeing all this stands Ridgeston: built like a Greek god and displaying the sort of libido most of us would die for. Let's face it, how many of us could cum three times in one session – and still make it look as if it's the most natural thing in the world?

As if to prove his extraordinary character, Ridgeston has superseded all the normal rules that one expects of his profession, overcoming his film company's regulations that would have prevented him from appearing in any of their films after the age of twenty-six. Georges Duroy seems to have realised just how special the young man is, and how unlikely he is to discover anyone to rival him. Ridgeston's fans have, therefore, been unequivocally blessed with the 2005 release of *Lukas in Love*, proving yet again that their hero is beyond comparison.

What's more, the new generation of actors (including the young pretenders to the throne, Tim Hamilton and Tommy Hansen) have also realised the iconic nature of their co-star. Their pretty faces are like those of kids on Christmas morning – unable to quite believe they are in the company of Ridgeston, who could probably command whatever fee he likes from his director, and whose reputation makes him the unrivalled star of any glitzy gay party. This sense of being overawed is most notable when the young wannabes come face to face with Ridgeston's cock. You can see it in their eyes: the look of near disbelief as they grasp the shaft that launched a thousand cum-shots, and the trance that consumes them as they suck on his holy pole. They know they are part of gay history.

These boys are the lucky ones. The rest of us can merely hand over our money and wank in amazement. But we ordinary mortals are privileged to have lived at the same time as this wondrous creature, to have been a part of his discipleship, and to have shared in Ridgeston's adventures as and when they occurred.

A hundred years from now technology will have changed beyond recognition. But the need for icons will remain unaltered. Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, Greta Garbo – these names will live on forever. But so, too, will the name of Lukas Ridgeston.

Future generations of gay men will remain as much in awe of the boy from Bratislava as those of

us who are alive today. Gay men will continue to Play-Rewind-Play-Rewind as they jerk themselves off to the finest action films in history. Almost like Greek myths, Ridgeston's stories will become ingrained into the very psyche of gay humanity until people will wonder whether such a divine animal could have existed. Or whether he was just a figment of an over-feverish imagination, and that any cinematic evidence is an elaborate hoax.

I often imagine what Juraj Vrzgula will think of his place in history when he is an old man and the passions of virile youth are like a dream. Will he take time to sit and watch himself as he was in his prime, fucking like a rabbit and shooting spunk twenty feet into the air? Will he realise the full

effect his films have had on millions of gay men who've slapped their cocks to distraction? Will he be proud of his iconic status, or will the prospect of physical death conjure up a notion of regret?

There are no answers to these questions. At least, not yet.

One thing is certain. Ridgeston will be remembered as the greatest gay cinematic icon of all time. A man who was truly unique in every sense of that word, and who, thanks to the wonders of cinema, will keep fucking his pals and emptying his balls until celluloid (like time itself) ceases to exist. ■

An Argument She Won

Aoife Mannix

07

The first proper row we ever had
was about *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*,
the film, not the book,
cos she'd only seen the film.
And she thought Daniel Day Lewis' character
was a total bastard,
and open relationships were a load of bollocks,
and all that shagging around
and making a philosophy out of it,
pretending it was different and new
and somehow interesting
when it was only sad and pathetic.
I tried to say maybe
it's more complicated than that,
maybe it's a question of finding a balance.
She got really annoyed then,
so that the blokes sitting at the next table
turned to stare.
Calm down, I said,
it's only a film.
Though we both knew it wasn't,
and a week later, I left him for her.

08





Fellini

Robert Seatter

Today I'd like to be in one of those over-the-top
1950s Fellini films.

I'd be monstrous, unblushing, with huge melon breasts
that you could rub your face in,
though I know you wouldn't;

or a mad uncle up a tree shouting "*I want sex...*"
with the whole family laughing and you down below
chomping on salami.

Or I'd be doing the old soft-shoe shuffle along the beach
at the straggling end of a wedding party –
sea up to my ankles, I wouldn't mind –

to the winsome tune of your dry-land accordion
from behind some chichi restaurant window;
or a paparazzo on a Vespa

shamelessly after your headline story,
wearing Marcello Mastroianni specs,
white raincoat flying,

while you snaked away up the Via Veneto –
glamorous in the backseat,
with not one turning look.

Or I'd be one big silhouette in the black and white light
shaking the chains around my rupturing he-man heart –
everything to give,

while you, the only other character left,
would be standing in the circus tent
wondering why you were there.

Then maybe the camera would pan round,
find you laughing then crying in spite of yourself –
strangely big-hearted as all the rest.

Confessions of a Badass Femme

Maria Mojo



SOME PEOPLE think I'm a Dumb Blonde. Personally, I try not to judge books by their cover. The binding that keeps our pages held tightly together could just be an illusion to mask what's really going on inside. You can spread my pages wide but you'll have to pummel real hard to uncover the plot that lies within. It's important you realise my sub-plot happens to be very sophisticated; there's a lot of *fist* in my *s sophistication*. Indeed, the charity I set up, Butchaholics Anonymous, can strongly vouch for that. BA strongly believes in aversion therapy, so it is not uncommon to find me bent over the Central Station pool table at last orders on a Tuesday, dutifully waiting for a random butch to spank me. I will be dragged up in femme garb with my lips smeared red, quivering in a hot Monroe pout to mimic my Cunt.

I say "femme garb" but I am not a "natural" Drag Queen. I am, however, the Queen of dragging big, shiny, phallic things out of the closet. Take the time I got my Barbie doll stuck up my ass. Now, before you go judging me, let me explain the logistics of such a delicate situation. She was an Afro Barbie, and I was trying to straighten her hair. Now, is that what a Dumb Blonde would do? I had a problem and I found the solution up my own ass. You may wonder why I'm so prickly about being negatively labelled, but I just hate to be misunderstood. My psychoanalyst, Dr Fraud, accuses me of being a sex addict with a narcissistic complex. He despairs of my lifelong passion for The Cunt. Dr Fraud, I fear, has Cunt Envy, that intense phobia some people have of potent, dark, powerful holes which can, and often do, swallow you up whole.

Dr Fraud believes my obsession with The Cunt stems from an irrational desire to impregnate the female sex. He theorises that my Cuntcentricity is caused by my lack of a penis. However, if he could see inside my closet, he'd be astounded by my vast dildo and cock collection, and, unlike the vertically-challenged real things, my cocks stay hard!

"There are black holes in your theory," I told the doctor, and watched him squirm.

"You are projecting a deep-rooted fear of your own racial and sexual identity," he retorted. "In order to gain something approaching a healthy identity, your black roots need to be exposed."

He said "black roots" as if they were a bad thing that I wanted to hide. Fool. Little did he know the joke was on him, that when I perform as the white idol of femininity I am only playing devil's advocate. For me, being a "dark woman in blonde's clothing" never fails to bring out a cathartic

moment, never fails to illuminate the ignorance that exists to keep you in your place. Black Roots! Tsk. Motherfucker... I'm a *natural* blonde.

In a recurring childhood dream, I'm offered a bit part in a movie. I'm directed to wait in a dark forest, and, on cue, pounce on my victim. I'm the Big Bad Wolf, and my innocent prey is an angelic blonde girl, all sapphire eyes and pure alabaster flesh. *Flesh* that my glistening fake fangs hunger to devour. *Flesh* pronounced beautiful as the feminine ideal. *Flesh* that got the part I auditioned for. I'd wake up growling, and crawl sleepily to my bedroom mirror to face a brown girl with dark primal eyes. I'd want to embrace her, comfort her, but each time my nose would bump the solid surface as my breath misted over the glass and obscured her image. Then my eyes would rise to see the reflection of my Marilyn Monroe poster from the opposite wall. "All Welcome"... her voice would beckon me in soft honey tones... "C'mon Sugar"... and I would go willingly... to sleep in a bittersweet fantasy that was never mine.

I grew up in Harlesden.

Growing up in Harlesden isn't easy for anyone. Growing up in Harlesden as a queer mixed-race kid who thought she could be Marilyn wasn't the greatest. It wasn't, that is, until I discovered Earl. It was the Seventies, and in Harlesden, where every Black man had an Afro, Earl had his hair shaved. He wore earrings in both ears, tight red leather trousers and heeled boots to match. To me, Earl was a big black gay pearl in the rotten oyster of Harlesden.

One evening I came home to find that our flat had been burgled. I walked into my bedroom; a rancid stench filled the air. *They* had pissed on my bed, and in *their* foul shit had written the words HALF BREED on my wall. Trembling, I ran to fetch a damp cloth and desperately tried to scrub the hate away. The memory of the smell remained in my room to taunt me. That weekend, my father, the social worker, taught me to shoot a gun in our backyard. I was nine, and I guess you could say I gained a false sense of empowerment. Still, I enjoyed shooting - whack, whack, *WHACK* - right into the centre of the target. I wanted to blow that box apart because I was never going back inside it. It's funny how a little gun can make you feel so powerful and still wound your soul every time you shoot it.

So there I was, living my days as Jilly the Kid, my nights as a she-wolf, and thanking God for

Earl; he dared to show the world that difference could strut the mean streets of Harlesden.

Although my father was an atheist from Barbados, my Spanish mother insisted I was raised Catholic. Earl lived with his white male lover who looked a lot like Jesus (the cool airbrushed Seventies version). I used to imagine I was Mary Magdalene, and Earl - John the Baptist, and we were going to save the world with our new brand of badass-growling Catholicism. I had also read in my *Good News Bible* that Jesus had unveiled his female self to Mary Magdalene, then gone on to produce some kind of holy golden seed. From what I could gather, Jesus did this as an act of faith to show her she could change the error of her ways. Hence my belief that The Magdalene was saved by getting all hot and sticky with a chick who called herself Jesus.

I carried my prayer book and rosary beads everywhere I went. Mary Magdalene, the allegedly repentant and crazed prostitute, became another important role model. I decided that if I didn't make it as a movie star, I would become either a nun or a fallen woman. Oh, the glamour of being a whore. Not that I actually knew at the time what that entailed. "Sex" was a big dirty word, and delightfully intriguing to a sexually awakening child.

Words were so powerful, but when they described something associated with the female, they seemed to become tinged with dark undertones and traces of disgust that hindered her movement. The word "cunt" hovered tangibly in the air, a shameful, gaping black hole, a curse on womankind. It seemed that if you were female, or dark, or queer, or dared to show yourself off in "unacceptable" ways, you were also cursed, and more disturbingly - weak. Earl appeared to block this side of the world out. He walked around Harlesden as if he were the lead female star in some big movie. Most of the time he'd get dark words spat at him and looks of disgust, but my

dark eyes adored him. And nothing, *nothing* would hinder *his* movement.

From the start, I realised that Earl and I shared a queer similarity. I'd given up the ballet because I thought it was a poofy thing for me to be doing. I was fighting with an inner demon of hyper-femininity, one that felt like a queer boy in a girl's body. I was utterly confused. I resented not being able to do "boy stuff" as well as play with "girls' toys." I rebelled by making model aeroplanes. Still, these planes would somehow turn from military fighting machines into camp glitter-starred rockets.

Every box I tried to fit in would fall apart. As a girl, it was socially acceptable for me to frolic around in my tutu. The problem was my pirouette;

it wasn't a subtle graceful spin like the other girls. Oh, no. Mine was a camp, clumsy, chaotic twirl where I would twist, leap to catch make-believe stars in hopeless abandon, then fall to the floor, not like a dying swan, but like a pitiful duck. Earl showed me I could be myself. I didn't have to be like the other girls. I would imitate his cute little wiggly strut and ask my mother why he was so different. She never answered that question directly. Earl empowered the feminine without actually being a woman. Perhaps, too, the dark

words could be twisted, subverted, and reborn in a more positive light. Perhaps I'd even accept my fondness for girls.

My belly would flip at the sight of Jo, an older tomboy who also lived on St. Mary's Road. She looked like Jodie Foster in the original *Freaky Friday* and was almost 11. Despite my intense shyness, she'd managed to initiate a friendship with me. Maybe she felt disassociated, too, and that's why we were attracted to each other. But, more likely, what drew us together was sexual discovery, considering we used to take it in turns to jump on one another, and her favourite pastime was taking me to see the porn stash underneath



the Boy Scouts' hut. I adored her.

As for my mother, she was getting increasingly concerned, especially after I'd asked her what a "lesbian" was; my new "friend" had been called one. My mother's face reddened and she managed to change the subject with her usual you're-too-young-to-know policy. But I could tell from her expression that the word "lesbian" was worse than "prostitute" and almost as bad as "fuck"! I then began to figure out that if a *prostitute* was a bad woman and *fuck* was an unutterable obscenity, a lesbian must be... a Badass Woman... *oh what a beautiful temptation...* To be a Badass Woman and walk like Earl! To not care if people thought I was disgusting or not! That's what I was going to be: A Badass Woman.

At first, I had to do it on the inside; some stains take longer to scrub away.

Through Earl, my inner she-wolf, and Marilyn's infectious smile, I grew up to discover that identities, like words, could be used at your whim and will. Their movement didn't need to be

hindered. You could be whoever the fuck you wanted to be at any given moment; performance is an option, not a necessity. So, I delight in uprooting my pages through the earth with the dirt still sticking to me. I delight in the magical and physical power of my Cunt and the Cunts of many others. I delight in my beautiful brown flesh of black and white descent, *and* I delight in my brazen femininity that remains in your face and not in its place!

There are so many chapters to be written, to tempt you, to make you see from another perspective and return to yourself – whole. Some books may not be open, yet when the closed pages throb against each other, and your fingers slide between them eagerly, they are always open for inspiration. Look a little deeper among the diamante, the dildos, and the bullshit that we really should keep up our own arses, and maybe we'll all find treasures in the deep dark forest. Now, where was I? Camera? Action!

The Underground Orchestra

River Wolton

Tuesday's the funeral and we who've barely touched since childhood, meander arm-in-arm along the kindly Thames. The film's about Parisian refugees – buskers and pianists, a string quartet who only play for love. We are ecstatic – it's the best you've seen for years – I want to dance. Is this what happens now we're parentless, devoid of reference points? We wander back on streets we've scoured all our lives as if we'd find a welcome. For hours you ponder over stacked CDs for the cremation, choose the perfect Bach, a Nocturne that reminds us all of him. I leave you to it, trusting you this time.

This Time It's Personal

Diana Cockrill

The Song Remembers When

For three years this story has been on the back burner. Now it can't wait any longer. I need to write it. Why the title? Michael Ball was one of the few places of common interest – she liked his voice, I liked his looks. The CD was a cheapie, bought while killing time in town as they cleaned my three-piece suite. I was getting rid of her, effacing the memory of things we'd done on that sofa. Why, then, should I want to keep the big patchwork cushion she made for me, with its complex pattern of two interlinking circles that turns out to be simple squares and triangles fitted together. When she gave it to me, I said it was like us – you couldn't tell if it was pink on a white background or white on a pink background. We were two women who made a mistake, tried acting on it, and found it defeated us. She'd say – oh, bugger her! I want to put it my way, even if I get my titles from songs on the disc. That's my trouble, there's nothing original about me.

Empty Chairs, Empty Tables

People are tracked by places just as much as by a particular song. The empty chairs I'm thinking of are in a pub in a gay-village area of a big town in the West Midlands. They are empty now, she's gone, and the woman who organised the poetry reading is dead. I was in two minds about going. But when I got there, someone new was in the group sitting around the table, which was unusual enough. The only vacant stool was next to this newcomer. Her voice sent a prickle of pleasure down my spine and into my sex – a natural contralto, beautiful of phrasing and economical of words. She had a trick of making a little movement of her head and a twist of her lips rather than put a single word in the wrong place. "Jill," she said. "What a lovely name." I'd hated it. Until that moment. Christ, I envied her. Why should she be able to put people at their ease when I couldn't? But I was on the town that evening, and I decided I wanted her, so I let my tongue loose round a pint of Stella without thinking of where it might lead.

Love on the Rocks

Lies trip you up in the end. I shouldn't have tried them on her before I found out how much she knew. Was that mistake number one? No, it was mistake n-thousand and one. I've always lied, to myself and to others. As a young girl, I invented a world to suit me. We were never middle class; I'd never reached Grade 4 piano (I failed Grade 1, then refused to have more lessons). She was all

she claimed to be – a peasant with a veneer of education, aware of herself and totally confident. I used to boast that my people came over with the Conqueror. Hers were here long before he even thought of invading.

It was the same for the alteration in her sexual status. Whatever she took on, she did with a completeness I'd have found impossible. Once she'd decided she'd be bisexual – because, as she said, you can't cut 23 years of marriage and motherhood out of your life – she became, in her own way, more butch than I could ever be. I don't think I was really a lesbian, just someone running from a marriage I couldn't stand any longer. It seemed the easiest way out. I always took that. I got myself pregnant at 19 because I didn't dare face the challenge of a job in Brussels. Before she'd married, she'd led what she called "the life of Riley," with all kinds of men and some women, and had never made mistakes. I ran from things – from my marriage, my children, myself, too, I suppose. She just left when the time came, running towards something, positive, definite.

It's no good. I've tried to capture her, but each time I read over a paragraph she's slid through its mesh, like the silver fish she was, slipping through my hands. What did I see in her? What did I really want?

I Don't Want a Lover

I fetched up in this town jobless and homeless, knowing nobody. She was solidly based with her County Council, owned her own house, lived in a village where she was accepted as a lovable rebel; if she'd turned up one day at a meeting and said she was a poached egg, no-one would have batted an eyelid. Being gay went under that heading. Her neighbours accepted her once they realised she wasn't going to eat their children.

She had quality. Whatever that means. My first two women were tarts, common as muck. You get that when you run away from things. Wherever she was going, she wanted to take me with her. That's why my children started to be afraid. We were together three years, a strange togetherness, Gemini and Pisces; one, a person divided against herself, the other, always pulled in two directions. Some horoscopes said we were ideally matched, others – that we should avoid each other. We did a bit of both.

Wind Beneath My Wings

She called me her muse. It's true she wrote more poems during our relationship than she'd ever

written for anyone. I'd told her I wrote poetry. Some claim! She called my work "salami" – cutting a piece of prose into lines and arranging it on the page. She was right. I couldn't tell a limerick from a sonnet then, and couldn't now, not really. Her letters were what she said: works of art. Like Jean-Luc Godard's pack of cards, with a beginning, a middle and an end. "But not necessarily in that order," she'd say. She wanted me to say clever things like that, except with her they came naturally. I kept a photocopy of the letter I sent her the day after we became lovers. It's a mixture of the real me, and the me I think I ought to sound like. Listen:

When we parted, I felt dazed and shaken. I had permitted the very special woman with whom I had just shared the honour and joy of the deepest intimacy to glide out of my experience down an escalator. I hope your journey home was satisfactory and wonder along which path your emotions were travelling.

She, on the contrary, went home and wrote a witty, filthy little limerick about us, followed by a sonnet which shook me with its sensitivity. I didn't know words could be used like that, not by ordinary people. But then, that's just what she wasn't.

Music of the Night

It was the same with music. She didn't divide it into Classical and Pop, only into good and bad music. I told her I knew lots about it. I didn't – I used to listen to Radio 2. I stopped short at Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and a record of mum's called *Excerpts from Messiah*, made in the days before such things were matters of music scholarship. That's another of her phrases. She just looked at the record sleeve and said in a tone of withering scorn, "Oh, yes – 1960s Huddersfield Choral Society style." She'd sung *Messiah* in the Royal Festival Hall in London for several years running and knew chunks of it by heart.

I used to watch her face when she came off the platform or out of the concert hall. It was true – music did set her free. In the car with some of her friends, I'd listen, my stomach twisting jealously, to their light-hearted analysis of the evening. The trouble was, they weren't saying things just to sound clever. They knew what they meant. It was their language.

"Yes, but when he started on the adagio... his tempo was wrong."

"I just hate muddy-sounding baritones."

"Did you see Alex's face when we missed those two bars!"

"Rutter's *Gloria* starts with the ten bars Walton left off *Belshazzar's Feast*."

Then she'd turn to me and apologise, for God's sake, for leaving me out of things, showing me up in public.

Even when we were alone together, I couldn't catch up with her. If I turned on Classic FM she could guess not just the composer, but usually the title and the actual movement of the work before I could count my ten fingers over. I used to say that when I was bringing up my family I didn't have time to listen to the radio. But she'd done all that *and* held down a full-time job, so that wasn't much of an excuse. I mixed Vaughan Williams up with Tippett, and said I didn't like what he wrote, that it was jangling. Pride stopped me admitting I'd got it wrong. She fascinated me, like a snake fascinates a bird it wants to catch and eat. Me, I wanted to be the great benefactor, but time and again I had to accept that I was only the recipient.

Love Changes Everything

Were we ever really in love? We were certainly in lust when we were together. Often, in company, the need to be alone so that we could kiss turned into a physical ache. Was she friend, girl-friend, lover, partner? Was she everything I needed in a woman? I used to leave the letter *u* out of my surname, punning on "missing u." You don't write things as silly as that if you're not in love. At least I don't.

Neither of us, now that it's all over, will resume life where we left it. She said at the beginning that if I hung around with her, I'd learn a lot and go places I'd never been before. Now, it only sounds patronising, but then it was what I so much wanted, to see things through her eyes and hear what she heard. Each failure stretched our rubber band relationship a little further, until there was no option but for it to snap, fly stingingly into both our faces. That's a phrase she must have used. I don't think I could have worked it out for myself.

I'm struggling to get across an impression of what she was like. She had her own life agenda, and bent things to fit them into it. She was an initiator, sociable, quick and aggressive. I'm the opposite. I analyse things to destruction level; I'm guarded, slow and passive. Perhaps that was one reason we enjoyed what we had, being opposites. She described me as a neat cameo of a person with clearly-defined edges, light and shade and a

silver surround. I couldn't see that. She was a ruby set in silver, with a fire-glow for a heart.

She was short, stout, her grey hair cropped; white when newly washed. Her eyes were light blue, and she always emphasised her eyebrows and lashes behind oval glasses. The way she wore her clothes made them classics, though she claimed they mostly came from charity shops. Me, I went to places like John Lewis and Debenhams, and still didn't manage it. I didn't need her top-to-toe raking glance to show me I'd got it wrong again.

The picture I'm making of her isn't coherent. But my reaction to her wasn't coherent, and still isn't quite settled. Was she really a person, or only some kind of book made up of bits of other people? No, that's just bitchery on my part, because I couldn't find the real her amongst the bushes and trees she planted around her. *Catch me if you can*, she seemed to be whispering, even at our most intimate moments. Or perhaps she was some weird – what's the word? Oh, yes, saprophyte. I've just looked it up. "Something which lives a dependant life on a host." Well, she slept in my bed often enough, used my shower gel, ate my food; whether that establishes her as dependant, or me as host, isn't something I can be specific about.

Bend over, let me see you shake your tail-feathers. I put up with her for a year, with all her superior knowledge and her abilities. I watched her charm my friends. I fought back rude comments when she criticised me. Then one day it was too much. At the bar of our favourite gay pub I stood looking back towards the platform where she was dancing with another girl from our group. She was all rhythm, every movement synchronised, living the beat of the DJ so much that even some of the boys were watching in admiration, in spite of her age and size. Like I say, suddenly I couldn't see her. I paid for the drinks, put them down on the shelf, ran and hid in the ladies toilet. I wanted her to come looking for me. She thought I was making too much of things. She didn't stay over that night. She said we weren't far from the station. I snapped that I'd parcel up her things and post them to her.

"Okay," she shrugged. "Goodbye, then."

My Heart Will Go On

I had a typical letter from her about six weeks later.

I told you my friends had to wait for my inclination to write to them. My goodness,

that makes you sound like some kind of unwelcome task, which you most certainly are not. At least now that we are friends, rather than lovers, I can say what I think and if you want to, you can disagree, and there will be no hard feelings.

My letters – and I hope you will simply enjoy them, take them at face value, not spend time looking for weird double meanings, which I promise you there certainly won't be – are usually long descriptions of what I've been doing, spiced with jokes, comments on current affairs and anything else that's worth saying. WARNING – you may need to carry an oxygen cylinder while reading, so as not to suffer from exhaustion. Whatever you want to say to me, and whenever you want to say it, you know it will give me pleasure.

She still couldn't resist taking a dig at me. I'd tried to address her in French, and even got that wrong. She closed with "*Votre* (please note correct use of plural) *bien dévouée*." I ripped the letter in half, and if I'd had a fire, I would have burned it. I'm glad I didn't.

I can't go on backtracking around corners that I've turned...

Our affair went the usual see-saw way of relationships between people who aren't equal and never will be. I caved in first, and begged her to come back:

Our love didn't die, it exploded. You primed my temper as a soldier primes his musket. I upset you first, and before that, you hurt me. And so it goes. Strange then, that I don't want to be without you. I miss you, I need you, I love you – please come back!

That's what I wrote on a card. We made it up cautiously. But I felt alarm bells ringing inside her; she'd identified me as a pseudo-person, and the more I struggled, the deeper I dug myself into that hole. She seemed unconcerned, just went on forgiving my mistakes and ignoring the silly episodes that cropped up between us.

The more I wanted us not to be identified as a gay couple, the more she seemed to try to do it. She took a perverse pleasure in dropping a word or a phrase into a conversation, talking about a gay film, play, author or musician in a way that implied that I, too, knew all about it. At first, she

was the one who drew her hand away. Now she was reaching for mine, putting her arm around me, kissing me in station waiting rooms or on the train where she knew we'd be labelled. It was like she was jeering at the world, and at me, for our lack of courage.

I sent her away because something she once said to me, in a kind of prophecy, had come true. "You'll go back to him," she remarked, as casually as if she was talking about the weather. "All that fuss about being a lesbian, getting out of the bonds of matrimony, it didn't mean what you tried to make it mean. One day something will happen, and you'll just throw it all away. And when it does, I shall understand – but I hope your heart breaks."

She never said she loved me – guess she thought I knew...

How true that last song is. We talked about love, we made love, but the one thing which was missing over the three years we spent pulling each other into pieces was any kind of direct statement from her. The words which matter, which cement people together. Perhaps she ought to have known I needed that reassurance. Perhaps I ought to have known she was too proud to say something like that in an increasingly shaky relationship.

She was away on one of her absurd singing weeks when I had the letter from my family. My children pointed out to me quite clearly that my ex-husband was my responsibility, now that he was ill; I'd had my fun, and I must pay for it. I didn't dare tell her the real reason. So when I wrote, I mentioned the good times we'd had, and played on my feelings of dullness against her knowledge. I said I felt like the village idiot when I was with her, especially when she poured scorn on my trivial remarks.

I've kept her reply, her last letter. I remember seeing on a TV programme that Queen Elizabeth kept her last letter from the Earl of Leicester, so I'm in good company.

*My dearest Jill,
Because that is what you will always be to me, no matter what. Thank you for your letter. You must be psychic... after a week of being with my own kind of people, witty, worldly, with a home-base of the knowledge and love of music, I was going to write to you and say just the same things. It is not fair of me to continue dragging you at my*

chariot wheels.

Shall I give the strap-on to the Girl Guide Jumble Sale? Maybe not!

Let me close with the words from the end of Part 1 of The Dream of Gerontius. (I know – you will say angrily that you were always too busy in the kitchen to listen to things like that.) "Go on thy course, and may thy place today be found in peace, and may thy dwelling be the Holy Mount of Sion: through the Same, through Christ our Lord." ■

The Iceberg Marlene

John McCullough

She who's never been anywhere
without the whole shebang:
kettle drums, entourage, cloak of foam.
Watch her now: a white fortress advancing
to flirt with Arctic mountains,
unbeatable as Lola-Lola.
A gorgeous slow-motion river,
her melted cast-offs priceless.

Lean in for the close-up.
Sure, she was lying: she's mere rubble,
devastated like the moon,
her face breaking into a mosaic,
suffocating beneath strata of make-up.
She can't steer herself,
has stared at the sky so long
she thinks she might be a cloud.

She doesn't even know
what's going on in her own body:
lakes swelling inside her,
cruel tunnels opening, collapsing,
cracks burrowing to plunge
her into psychosis.

Or has she fooled you again?
It's hard to take Marlene seriously
because she's Hollywood
in its enormity, a glassy puzzle of bit-parts,
all waiting for the applause which says:
You, yes, you dear, are everything.

18



Sarah Pucill
Untitled



19

From "*Stages of Mourning*" 16mm, 20min, (2004).

Sarah Pucill
Untitled

Things You See in the Dark

Drew Payne

20

WHEN I was growing up in 1970s suburban Liverpool my father ran a small independent cinema. It sat at the end of a short parade of shops, off a dull traffic island. It was not a glamorous cinema; there was no plush upholstery or elaborate decoration, just a single-screen barn of a building, the small foyer always in need of re-painting.

It being an independent cinema, and because of the rise of the big distributors and studios, my father wasn't always able to get those first-run big budget films; they only came his way after the cinemas in town had shown them. But this didn't hold him back; my father ran his cinema with a rolling programme of films throughout the year, often films requested by one of his regular customers. During the week he showed double features, from noon till midnight. Saturday mornings would be the Kids Club, with a film and cartoons; Saturday afternoons – Matinee Feature, usually a drama or romance; then the evening would be a themed triple bill of horror, sci-fi or thriller films. Sunday afternoons would be Classic Matinee, showing one of the 1940s or 50s movies my mother loved so much; Sunday evenings would be Family Features, a double bill my father deemed suitable for family viewing.

The cinema closed for Christmas Day, Boxing Day and Easter Sunday, and though it often felt as if only a handful of people were ever watching any one film, the cinema made a healthy living, and my father was able to employ his three – what my mother called – “happy insomniacs.”

My parents and my older brother and I lived in a tiny detached house behind the cinema. My father said he needed to be on-hand if there were any problems; my mother, who worked two nights a week as a Sister in our local casualty department, didn't care where we lived, as long as it was warm and dry and had a “nice” kitchen.

I've always loved films, losing myself in the worlds they created, even if it was only for ninety minutes. Compared to my dull, grey suburban life in Liverpool, even films set in small-town America were exotic. But most of all, I was drawn to the neat and complete nature of films. They had a beginning, a dramatic middle, and then an ending where all the conflict and action were neatly and tidily resolved. These films weren't messy and unfriendly and grey like the world around me.

I was not a discerning film-goer; I'd watch any and every film that came my way: westerns, sci-fi, horror, high drama, low camp, even cheap schlock sentiment. I loved them all: the good, the bad, and the plain dull. My father had no problem

with me sitting at the back of the cinema watching the film that was showing. I was only kept out of a film when either the cinema was full (which didn't happen much) or when my father deemed the film “unsuitable for your age.” This latter bar was easy to get around. If a film was playing that I wasn't allowed to see, I went when my father wasn't there and one of his employees would wave me in.

In the darkness of the cinema, on the rickety old tip-up seats, I would lose myself, ignoring everything around me. This escapism didn't leave me unaffected. I had retreated from a world where I was ostracised and bullied, labelled the outsider for no apparent reason. Watching those films, I absorbed, without question or criticism, all their values; but worst of all, I believed their unqualified homophobia.

As I turned into an adolescent, via the hormonal storm of puberty, I became increasingly aware of my sexuality. I felt a physical and emotional attraction to other boys, especially those who strutted around my school like stereotypes of masculinity. The worst thing you could be was a “fucking queer,” and so, with acute self-preservation, I buried my feelings and kept silent.

If they were named at all in the films, they were sissies or fags or queers. All the images I saw of gay men were of sad young men, doomed by their “perversions.” There were “confused” youths corrupted by older men, then rescued by the love of a good woman or lost to death or damnation. There were camp sexless men, flamboyantly-dressed one-dimensional parodies. There was the single friend or neighbour, pathetic and lifeless. There were the predators and psychopaths, a threat to decent people and to family life.

Was this what life had to offer me? Would I have to be the single male friend who gave his everything for the well-being of the straight hero. It was not an attractive life, especially when I was confronted daily with homophobia.

The onset of puberty saw the 70s turn into the 80s, and along with the rise of conservatism and traditional values, came AIDS, “the deadly gay plague.” I withdrew further into myself. My sexuality became the dark secret at the centre of my being.

I still went to see films as often as I could. My father, who was now battling the rise in big chain cinemas and a waning public interest in visiting the cinema – everyone (not us!) was buying a video recorder – had to become more and more imaginative in his programming. I got to see films whenever

er I wanted to, and now that I was a teenager, there were fewer films my father deemed “unsuitable.”

I often fell in love or lust with the leading men of those films. I was attracted to their clean-cut, muscular handsomeness, to their heterosexual hero image. I justified this as admiration of all the values and virtues I longed for. They were the ideal I strived for. These men inhabited my sexual fantasies.

Sex in 1980s Hollywood movies was a dangerous thing. It could destroy lives, marriages, whole families. It was as dangerous as any gun or bomb. Yet the flip side was that sex – neat, clean sex – was also the hero’s reward. I longed for the confidence and faith those Hollywood heroes had in their sexuality. I longed for their sexuality.

Independent and European cinema, becoming more prominent in the 1980s, simply didn’t make it as far as suburban Liverpool. The majority of films I saw were from Hollywood, with the occasional flagship British one. The slowly emerging Queer Cinema stopped short of where I was; as far as I was concerned, it didn’t even exist.

One night in the autumn of 1986 everything changed.

I was studying for my O Levels and approaching my sixteenth birthday. I was focused on my studies. Good O Level results meant I could study for my A Levels, and good A Level results meant I could go to university, and university meant I could escape from the place I hated the most – my home in Liverpool.

That week, my father was running a programme of films from the new British film industry, films riding on the success of *Chariots of Fire*. All I knew about *My Beautiful Laundrette* was that it was a comedy about Asian businessmen. Taking a break

from my homework that Wednesday evening, I slipped into the back of the cinema to watch the movie. There, in the dark cinema, I was swept off into another, unexpected world.

Two beautiful young men – Omar, the central character, and the white boy, Johnny – loved each other. They were affectionate, they kissed, they had passionate and intimate sex. At the end of the film they stayed together. Neither of them died.

I sat absorbed, experiencing the most wonderful moment of my life. Here was a portrait of homo-

sexuality I’d never seen before: a gentle and loving gay relationship, a relationship that brought out the best in its lovers, not one that made them tear each other apart. It was a revelation. It was like witnessing a magic trick, the way these two lovers put pay to all the homophobic lies that had gone before.

Here was a life I could aim for. I was in love. Not with the actors, but with the relationship between the two characters. I wanted to be like them: standing at a sink, stripped to the waist, washing my lover’s chest.

When the film ended – far too quickly – I waited until the handful of other people had left the cinema, then pushed myself up

out of my seat and slipped into the tiny foyer. There was Billy, one of my classmates; a tall and lean blonde boy. He smiled back at me, the smile of someone who’d obviously enjoyed the film he’d just seen. Instead of sneaking away, embarrassed to have been caught watching “one of them films,” he walked up to me.

“That was brilliant, wasn’t it?” he said.

“It was great,” I said. “Best film I’ve seen in ages.”

He then lent forward and whispered, “I’d give that Johnny one.”

“I’d give one to both of them,” I whispered



back, bold with excitement and his unexpected admission.

"Too right," he said.

Then we laughed, giggling a slightly silly laughter. The laughter of two boys sharing a private joke.

"You want to go for a coffee or something?" Billy asked.

We didn't become lovers and walk off hand-in-hand into the sunset. Instead, we found in each other a close and lasting friendship. Billy was my first real friend. Together we set about coming out. We bought our first gay magazines together, went to our first gay club together, went to our first gay youth group together, supported each other through our first relationships. Even went to the same university, together, where at first everyone thought we were boyfriends – much to our amusement.

Now we both live in London. Billy with his artist lover only a short distance from the cluttered house I share with my partner, Marc. We still share a love of films and regularly see one together, then spend hours discussing it.

My father retired, bullied into it by my mother when his health started to fail, so my brother bought the place and swiftly turned it into an Art House cinema. He had it redecorated and refurbished, and built a cinema bookshop off the main foyer. He started showing programmes of European films, independent films, classics and movies with limited release. He shows all the films the multiplexes and chain cinemas would never consider showing. And, thanks to his energy and relentless publicity, the cinema is now Liverpool's leading Art House cinema. Plans to extend it are in the pipeline.

Last summer, during that hot and dry stretch we had in 2005, I returned to Liverpool. My brother was having a week-long Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, and he insisted I had to be there. He'd put together an impressive programme: there was a film about a gay Mormon, another about gay teenagers in love, another about survivors of child abuse, one about an AIDS widower. There were none of the "sad faggots" or "suicidal perverts" of the films I'd grown up watching.

On opening night, I sat in the same seat I'd always sat in – now padded! – in a cinema full of people watching a gay film with openly gay characters, a film I'd never seen before. But I was looking forward to the next evening. Almost twenty years had passed since I'd first seen *My Beautiful*

Laundrette here.

The film's final scene, of the two lovers washing each other's chests over a workroom sink, had stayed with me throughout my twenties as a powerful fantasy. I longed for a lover who's chest I could wash, with whom I could laugh and splash water at over a sink. Marc and I have the relationship I'd dreamed of finding. I've washed his back in the bath, cared for him when he's ill, cooked for him and listened to him, and he's done the same for me. But I've never washed his chest as we stood together, stripped to the waist, at a sink. Two more days, and I'd be back home in London. Was it time to fulfil that fantasy? Would it be as erotic and romantic as the film had been? There was only one way to find out. ■

The Rex

Char March

It was 1962, in Anstruther,
with Eileen MacIntyre who snorted
when she spoke. I wore my floppy velvet
hat that I refused to use fleaspray on
and she had her dung-yard wellies, so
not many sat near us. And the rest
moved when we brought out our sardines
and started cracking the boiled eggs
on the armrests. And the place emptied
when she opened up in her opera baritone
about cunnilingus not being great
when Morag had just done an all-nighter
in the lambing shed. I slept through the film
– something with David Niven in, as ever –
my head cushioned against her missing
left breast, the armrest welding in
like another rib. *Barbour* was embossed
backwards on my cheek when I woke – her
carrying me up the back-lanes home.

23

Armchair Cowboy

Radcliff Gregory

All the young dudes
of Americana,
from *Chicago* to the
Copa Cabana,

rise from the ghettos
and glare of graffiti,
to crown a prom queen
who outshines Nefertiti.

The dudes on the drag strip,
in their Buicks and Pontiacs,
doffing their Stetsons,
dream of tail-finned Cadillacs.

It's a *West Side Story*,
an American dream,
to dress like Priscilla,
the desert drag queen.

Family Video

an extract from *Chameleon*

John Dixon



24

UNTIL I get a job I am stuck at home, bored, watching my videos over and over and fantasizing endlessly, my only company poor housebound Mother, who has very little contact with the outside world – except via television. I sit with her most evenings, at least during her meal. She gets very uptight with certain programmes. She never likes having women in the house and women newscasters, weather forecasters and chat-show hostesses come in for special venom. They seem to regenerate her. Quite unexpectedly, she will give a nervous twitch and shout, thrust out her arm and clenched fist, more in a salute than a punch. She reserves particular hatred for women politicians – Women in the House, as it were – and throws things at the screen.

There's no great danger; nowadays she has few solid foods and no crust or rind. She does not need a knife. There is no possibility of her being given a metal fork as she might jab it into her cheeks or lips as her nodding head and trembling hand fail to coincide. Her spoon and plate are plastic and virtually no use for throwing. An occasional gob of food reaches its mark and slithers down the screen, but most fall short and are cleared up by the home help, Mrs Mansell, who tut-tuts like a baby.

Mother is particularly fond of crisps, rice flakes, popped corn, potato puffs and other easy-to-eat items. She likes all the flavours – Spicy Tomato, Burger 'N' Chips, Fish 'N' Chips, Scampi-and-Lemon. Prawn crackers are her favourite; she leaves them on her tongue to melt – like her heart pills. The fish is good for her brain.

She likes milk-shakes and cartons of fruit juice. She leans over the side of the wheelchair to the cup attachment. "Suck that frothy milk up the straw, Mama. Just like those boys you warned me against."

She'd be marvellous in a takeaway queue. I could see her sucking a chicken bone and throwing it at a personal enemy. She ends up surrounded by crisp packets and drink cartons and serviettes that look like tissues after sex. She makes no attempt to put them in any of the wastepaper baskets Mrs Mansell or I have strategically dotted around her wheelchair circuit. "Mama, I'll have to put a bin attachment onto your chair. But you might not be able to get through the doors without a clang!"

She has learned to use the TV remote control and keeps it on her food-tray attachment. She stabs frantically at it with her arthritic fingers and goes from mute to loud, from channel to channel to fluttering spots, and from black and white to excessive bright colours. Sometimes she pushes the

Off button and looks around bewildered, shaking the remote control quizzically, almost chimpanzee-like. "Where's it gone, you naughty Mama?" She looks sheepish and quite by chance hits the right button and the picture and volume come flooding back to her great delight. "Clever Mama."

I have long felt she, just as much as I, should have access to video facilities. Hers, unlike mine, are only the tame ones from the local shop. Her favourites are Nature programmes. She has come to derive more pleasure from these innocent videos than I do from my porno ones. They get her out of her housebound condition to distant lands, beautifully photographed. The patience and trouble taken to get the shots is admirable. Sometimes a flowering plant or a hatching egg is speeded up to add to the excitement. Mama herself has learnt to use the Fast Forward; and to my annoyance she uses it to bypass the mating scenes, which obviously bore her.

The hunting scenes, however, really excite her; she uses Slow Play, Pause and Rewind. Mama likes a drop of violence. How she clapped when those two cunning lionesses outwitted and felled a stupid old wildebeest. Mama banged her stick in joy and tried in vain to circle on the spot in her wheelchair till the whole thing began to judder on its brakes. And her delight was boundless when that little Pink's Gazelle didn't leap quite high enough – and Oh, my goodness, why should cloven hooves be the symbol of evil when they disappear so quickly, all-in-a-bunch, down the throat of an alligator? And when the delicately plumaged and almost extinct Pettel's Grebe paid too much attention to the bald eagle circling high above its wispy crest and not enough to the out-size pike right underneath its elegantly paddling webbed feet – the latter appendages incidentally are just as necessary as wings in the early stages of taking off from water

And frankly, if it had got away, there would have been one night-long 'OhNO' of disappointment. And "Don't you want your crispies and your baby food, lovely beef and bone, you like that, don't you? Cluck! Cluck!" And I would have had no choice but to get back her appetite and enthusiasm by playing her very favourite tape of all. The little scene where the precocious Fleck's Monkey (just like a miniature human being in every way) learns from its devoted parents the skill of using tools for nut-cracking, and, in a surprise shot, beautifully filmed, over-reaches itself, rubs two sticks together and roasts itself alive – to the accompaniment of an hysterical jibbering, comparable only to that which Mama makes as

she drums her spoon on her side-plate and frantically ladles and slurps at the lumpy bits in her oxtail soup.

"You enjoyed that, didn't you, Mama?"

She makes a primal Ur-noise.

Nature's cruel and we're all animals, and dogs do it, etc and now even Mama's getting in on the act. What with her love of violence, the fast food and creating rubbish, she seems to be modelling herself on the very tear-aways she so warned me against.

I prefer to watch the struggle of two equally posed/poised men get a satisfaction they both desire and which leaves them alive and smiling – or at least only post-coitally sad. It must be easier for the cameraman, too; no need to travel, wait for the mating season and film outside, in the rain, at night. On the other hand – and I'd really like to try – getting some of the angles in human mating must involve gymnastic contortion comparable to that of the principal actors. It's something I'd really like...

Oh, God, there's no going to bed yet. Mama's wheelchair has gone wrong – or possibly she's broken it. Vandal. So that's my task for the rest of the evening. Now *there's* a manly occupation! Boring enough to make your mind wander. I really should know which hole each screw goes in. Wheels and levers and pulleys and brakes, adaptors for traction attachments – all in multigym blue. And sporty, too! "Round, round, git around." Wheelbarrow races, chariots, paraplegic basketball. I ought to paint it bright track-suit colours or the colours of an inner-city designated play area.

Mama, how well you used to get up speed round your circuit of rooms, your late-night finale round the block. The skid marks on the carpet resemble the points at Milan Central.

Mother fixes me with her eye. I cannot bear it and avert my stare and imagine I am elsewhere. Among my videos, making new ones. I am a rough thickie, redeemed by my boyish-on-the-make street wisdom and She is a Middle Class Bitch-Mama. I set the scene and play it out.

How the woman looks at me – Mm! That's me. Always good at games. Some more than others. She is wearing sky-blue and comes in from the front right – full-face, full-bra, etc. She smiles, as I turn to her, an exhausted, delighted child. (The child's me, not the brat I'm teaching and who happens to be her child. No real children in this video, please. No distracting children or animals. No kiddy/kitty porn.)

I do my thickie imitation, oozing enthusiasm, lapsing momentarily into jokey Californian accent, neck twitching, punching the air, dancing from leg to leg, dribbling with an imaginary ball. My shirt is open enough to show a suggestion of hair and half-lune pecs. My tracksuit bottoms have ridden up to expose different lengths of leg. The boyish imbalance! Don't they always laugh at it! Except the balls – which they like to level up with cupped fingers or tongue.

Should I adopt a Northern Accent? Or a slightly breathless one? A just-off-the-track-but-HAPPY-to-talk-to-you-SURE-no-problem-but-please-scuse-gasps-for-breath. (NB Breff would probably be better: *Audio editor*.)

On the word breath/breff, I clutch my chest, more in the region of the heart than the lungs, as if to imply an immanent coronary – Urhurgh! Urhurgh! Aaaaar! She cries out in delight. Here is man who throws himself with full-blooded commitment, risking his not-inconsiderable All, in pursuit of His-Own-Goal.

"I've got so much pleasure from games," I gasp, nodding, neck-twitching and fishing. "I feel I must pass it on to the young uns."

Anyone else would have puked, but –

"Oh, you're so sympathetic," her eyes seem to say, as she shields them from the sun, all the better to concentrate on my open, uncomplicated face radiating warm sympathy – but which unexpectedly clouds to a manly toughness tempered with sweet reason as the following platitude trips to mind and tongue –

"After all, you compete a lot in sports. There's got to come a time when you – co-op-er-ate."

"Who's a philosopher, then?" she coos silently, only her face, hands and whole body registering total and positive response.

"People said I was good when I was younger," I continue, "but I never thought so myself."

"I'm sure you were," she says helpfully, adding quickly, "Still are."

"I didn't make the highest grade – so I teach."

(Two sets of teeth, bared in laughter, catch the sunlight long enough to gleam and sparkle but not long enough to dry and acquire a matt finish and pucker the upper lip as it descends to its normal position.)

"Teachers are so important."

"I had a marvellous sportsmaster at school. Good-all, he was called. Nothing bad about him at all. Taught me all I know."

"He sounds wonderful."

"What was your games mistress like?" (Usual fucking dyke? I wanted to add, but didn't.) (NB

You should have done. This is an adult video – turning out to be heterosexual as well. Real men love watching women together. But NOT men together, *Ed.*)

“Actually, she said I had a rather good line in....” I didn’t catch the sport she mentioned.

“Now, that’s interesting,” I’d say (full-face registering. “No, it fucking isn’t”). “I knew somebody who coached in that.”

“Really.”

On second thoughts I’ll give a miss to playing sports with her. She doesn’t want to either. Not sports. (Longshot – shaking her head [disbelief/refusal] at the queue at the turnstile of the Sports Centre.)

“I don’t get a lot of time for team games or competitive sports now. I’ve got some weights indoors.”

“So you get all the exercise you need at home?” she says, hooding her eyes and crinkling up her mouth and totally losing breath control.

“Yeah,” I repeat. “I get all the exercise I need at home and I certainly feel fit with it.”

“You look it, too,” every orifice engorging me.

“Yeah,” I say, nodding to myself, drawing back my long sleeves to expose biceps which I squeeze before making an imitation punch which inadvertently brushes against her – with my weight-training gloves (similar to driving, but with more of the knuckles exposed. Mm! See that tautened, lightened skin! Clenched for a wank or a punch – an imitation punch that brushes against her tit, just a glancing blow – “Only a glancer, Me Lud” – my hardest against her softest, tautlessest of our joint whatevers.

Sudden chemistry! Instant electricity! Or at least something to do with Physics – though come to think of it, Magic would do. Her nipple gets erect – sensing, not so much danger, as prey. Alert, upturned as the nose of a pointer dog poised to sniff out and retrieve the game, angle poised on the boundary that separates it from its quarry. (Close up of her nipple popping out of its brazier-boundary and sniffing in the direction of a very fine profile of my crotch (which, NB dear cameraman, as you have probably realized without my telling you, may be photographed to equal advantage from left or right.)

“Your kids are very good at sport,” I say to keep the ingratiating balls rolling. “Better than I was at their age.”

“Really. That is something. I knew they were better than their father must have been when he was their age.”

“That goes without saying,” I said without

saying it and a mere nod of my eyebrows.

“I don’t know where they get it from.”

Mm! Feel that knife go in for the Father of her children. But! Uh huh! Here comes another man – that is, any man but me. The husband in fact. No sooner mentioned than appearing, such is the subtlety of porno video plot-lining. The very father in fact the knives are out for. Need this pose a problem? Not for me, that’s for sure. Wouldn’t like to be in his shuffling old carpet slippers, though.

“Your children show promise at games,” I say to him to justify my conversation with his wife.

“A healthy mind,” he pipes, “in a healthy . . . whatever do you call it? Oh, what is the word? We’ve all got one. How annoying. For most people it’s the only evidence of their existence. I hope my children don’t get so forgetful.”

“I’m sure regular exercise....” I say, running on the spot.

“Possibly. I suppose they must play in order to do well at school. I’ve such academic ambitions for them.”

(Academic ambitions! She and I lower eyes together. And silently mouth – “Yah! Boo! Schoolwork!” We both look much younger in this shot than we did earlier in the video.)

“Gee! Shucks, Squire. They’re only young. Let em enjoy their childhood. Who wants to be at school? Who wants to be inside on a day like this?”

(Her eyes meet mine again. On a day like this, who wants to be inside? Inside where. Quick switch to Fucking Scene. Indoors. In beds. In between. Insides – and Ups.)

I lift Mother forward in the wheelchair and cradle her in my arms. “Time for bed, Mama.” You are my child now, safely back in your pram. I’m the only child you ever had and you’re the only child I’ll ever have. Mother and child in one.

Her eyes are fixed on me. Her uncontrollably shaking head is refusing to accept something – stop that neck-twitching, please – but her eyes stay still and fixed as if daring me. It’s alright, Mama, you’re not in this video. Credit me with some decency. I draw the line at near-necrophiliac-incest, almost-dead Mum-Fuck.

I wheel her to her bedroom and count out her heart pills. “Put them under your tongue and let them dissolve. Swallow them – and you’ll choke.”

I go to bed myself without playing any of my videos. The video recorder is playing up, mashing up all the tapes. I’m not going to risk it tonight. ■

Boys Don't Cry

Mima Simic

A SMALL stain of yellow light appears sporadically on the window of our train compartment, then is swiped away by the bare branches of the tall ash trees that grow in the swamp by the tracks. The train moves slowly, the moonstain on the thick grimy glass trembles and flickers like a match in the wind. Three beer cans on the plastic table in front of us – I will douse the journey in alcohol, set fire to the moment, then pick through the ashes for a story.

My friends are as crazy as I am, but only because the beer is on me. And the tickets. We took the last train. We'll get there after midnight and we're not even sure where she lives or whether we'll be able to find her. It will be different in her hometown – so small there are no trams or buses, the place so walkable and safe as if made out of Lego blocks – yet we don't know it and we'll get lost among its footpaths, in those perfectly round Lego holes, pure-coloured, perfect fit.

At the other end of the train tracks, in the city, she sleeps the days away and studies at night. Before she goes to sleep, she walks the deserted streets barefooted, morning dew cooling the asphalt down to the temperature of her soles. The big city doesn't scare her in the fuzzy daybreak, it belongs to her; grey has become her favourite colour. She goes back to the quiet dorm, and the orchestra of her shower sends sounds through the pipes, ten rooms down the hallway to flood my dreams.

She puts eye-drops in her eyes, nose-drops in her nose, moisturiser on her skin which is so soft it is liquid, and rubs anti-bacterial cream into her face, cleaning herself into a temple, a maternity ward. She slips under the covers, her body loose in her pyjamas. Then she turns off her roommate's alarm clock and disappears.

Janja, her room-mate, is my best friend who sometimes reads her diary. That's how I know about the barefooted strolls, her bonding with the city, and that's how I know her new favourite colour. I hear about other rituals from Janja, who's always late for morning classes. Sometimes I smell them furtively on her pillow, when she's not there and Janja's in the bathroom. Because of her sleeping patterns, and the fact she goes home for weekends, I rarely see her and sometimes don't even recognize her when I bump into her at an evening lecture or in the dining hall. If we're in the same company, we exchange a few glances – I tend to start jabbering and she to walk away. She doesn't like my stories, or when I slap her on the back, ruffle her hair. Fuck off, she says.

Once she came over to borrow a book and I played her one of my songs. (In her diary she

wrote it had been as embarrassing as watching a talk-show with people displaying emotions like tasteless, cheap knick-knacks in a shop window.) Then she kissed me, out of pity, I suppose, on the corner of my mouth.

Another time we were supposed to go to the movies together, but the movie wasn't on. We stayed in her room, sat on her bed and talked. And then, spontaneous as if on *Candid Camera*, I leaned over and kissed her. She kissed me back, the tip of my tongue already tasting regret. The next day she went home. It wasn't a weekend.

"What a love story," says Janja, licking the beer foam off her hand.

The humming of the train engine is lulling me into a fantasy, moontripping. Kiti had cried throughout the movie but she was already drunk when we got in there.

"What a fucked-up love story," echoes Kiti, cradling her beer can, her lips dancing around the opening, following the rhythm of the rocking train.

"Romeo and Juliet, they never felt this way I bet... –" I sing, slowly sewing a smile onto my face.

"It's just that our little Juliet doesn't seem to know it yet." Janja takes another long sip and sinks back into her seat.

We're about halfway there when our compartment door slides open and a man asks if he can sit with us. As if the train was full and there were no seats anywhere else. Kiti, the least shy and the most drunk, starts talking to him. He has a crumpled face and dry wrinkled skin. He stretches his naked arms forward and makes us guess what the round little things that look like bugs crawling under his skin are. I ask if they're some kind of mite, ticks maybe. He laughs. Then he strokes Kiti's hair and glides his hand down her shoulder. She pushes his hand away playfully.

"Nothing before the wedding night," she says in a serious voice and looks at the man with her eyes wide open. Blink-blink, like in a cartoon.

"And I, as her older sister, will reserve the right to that first night," says Janja.

"Hell, I'll marry you both," says the tick-master.

"Lucky *yous*," I mumble, just loud enough to be heard.

"Don't worry," he looks at me. "I wouldn't marry *you* if you were the last woman on Earth... Are you a woman anyway?"

"No," I say. "But with the right guy, certainly..."

He asks if we watch TV and we say we don't have one. He says he was on this TV show, the Croatian *Believe It Or Not*, because he was married thirty-four times or something. He spends all his money on alimonies and dialysis. Kiti and

Janja are fascinated.

"Which one did you love the most?" Kiti asks.

"But where are we gonna live?" says Janja.

He says he doesn't understand women; they change as soon as the ring slips onto their finger. They sure as hell do.

The train conductor comes in to check our tickets. Says he gets off where we do and can give us a ride to wherever we're going. The bugs in the guy's arms crawl back into his armpits.

It's pitch black outside when we get off the train. The moon has disappeared even though I can't see any clouds. Or is it all cloud?

"So, what are you girls doing here so late at night?" the conductor-turned-driver asks, as the car tires fondle the curves in the road, Janja and I swinging in the backseat.

"We've come to party," says Kiti. "We heard you have an awesome disco here."

"Well, if the music disappoints you, our boys sure won't. They're much nicer than those in the city."

"I'm sure," says Kiti.

In the apartment building where she lives, some of the doors have no names on them, and she's behind one of them. Kiti and I sit on the stairs and send Janja to put out feelers and follow the scent of her room-mate. The beer has drained her of all inhibition, and she's going around merrily, knocking on every nameless door, singing softly to herself, pop songs. My guts are snarled and squeezed; Kiti's leaning over the banister, swaying like a child at the playground. Familiar voices leak down from upstairs. Janja has found her. When we go up, her glance plummets from my face to the carpet like a severed limb.

"We saw the movie," I blurt out helplessly. She says nothing. Then invites us in.

She lives with her grandmother, but her grandmother's away. The apartment is not how she would have fixed it herself, but her grandmother *will* die eventually. She may even keep the needle-points on the walls – they appeal to her sense of the grotesque. She will throw out all the furniture, and the carpets, and she will finger-paint the rooms – when her grandmother dies.

She doesn't look at me, and when I lay my hand on her shoulder, she says: "Let's go out, the disco's still open." So we go out. On the way, we buy some beer at an all-night gas station. The beer is pretty bad but we drink more. We walk down the street towards the disco, two by two – she and Janja leading the way. She – an apparition

in the blazing white nightgown she's wearing over her shirt and trousers. This is the corner where she had her first kiss, this is the wall she jumped off and broke her arm trying to show her boyfriend – the love of her life, the tattoo between her shoulder-blades – that she could fly with an umbrella, *a la* Mary Poppins.

We walk in silence, and when I put my hand on her shoulder this time, she doesn't move.

"It's all shit," I say, not really knowing what I mean.

She knows. A faint taste of beer on her lips.

The disco is a hole, she talks to everybody there. I sit in a corner while Janja and Kiti dance. The music is loud but we're all drunk and numb – or want to be. She comes over and kisses me, hard and violently, as if it isn't me she's kissing, as if I was the tattoo on her back, a nightgown over her clothing, a hammer to shatter the small-town shop-windows. I kiss her as the music becomes unbearable.

Walking back to her place, the sky paling into dawn, we kiss our way home with Kiti and Janja lagging behind, their lips chafed with the worst beer and even worse boys. They fall asleep in front of the TV and we go to her room. The shutters are drawn all the way down, and in here it's night again.

"I'm drunk," she says, and lets me kiss her.

I want to suggest we elope, run away from this small town – but she already has. I want to tell her we could wear out car tires together, get lost somewhere, mapless, disoriented, but the thing is: I can't drive and neither can she. I want to tell her how I cried at the movie, even though I didn't, but I wanted to, and I can't say anything because my lips are on hers and we're on her bed. There are only blurred contours of her in the smothered light of the room. I undress her – and when I touch her, her body, without warning, falls apart in my hands, breaks to pieces like quicksilver. Her eyes, her lips, her nose, her breasts soft and warm, the smoothness of her stomach, the damp curls where her thighs intersect – fragments no touch can glue together again. But I keep touching – because I can't let go, because I know everything there is to know about spells and small towns.

She slowly slides away from under my hands, and gets up from the bed. Then looks at me gently, too softly, and ruffles my hair. Then she's gone.

Her mother, who lives in the apartment upstairs, drives us to the train station in the morning. The distance is perfectly walkable, but we're too tired. When we'd got up, I'd asked her if everything was

alright – with us, I mean. She spat out a “yes” with her toothpaste. Then she flossed.

At the train station I buy a newspaper, because Kiti and Janja will sleep on the train. I look back at her and there she is, standing under the station’s sign, her mother’s hand on her shoulder. She makes a small wave in our direction, an impromptu goodbye.

As we walk to the train, the skies suddenly open and, as if out of a heavenly bucket, rain pours down on us. Kiti and Janja run – and I walk slow-

ly, sheets of newspaper covering my head. On the train, I take a window seat, just in time to see her back disappear behind the swinging station door.

Kiti and Janja are leaning against each other, already dozing, as I spread the paper out in front of me – the black print dissolving into a perfect grey. ■

Woman

Sharon Morris

29

To see this woman on screen –
watch for fifteen minutes
her face, turn her head once
on the pillow, hair spread out in a halo,
muscles in her neck stiffen, eye-
lids closed, silence,
except for ambient sounds
in the room

full of people sat gazing at
the shape of her lips
change, her mouth opening,
appearance of her tongue,
widening of her mouth, and after
the moment of orgasm,
eyes flying open
looking back at us,

a smile on her lips,
and as Breda Beban says
this work is less about masturbation
than Van Gogh’s field of corn, crows
flying overhead, is
about agriculture.

Stills from *Beautiful Exile* (2003), Breda Beban

30



Paul Hartnett/PYMCA
Mannequin,
NYC, 2002



31

Paul Hartnett/PYMCA
Clubbers at
Matthew Glamorre's
Kashpoint,
London, 2005

"ONE FOR the ladies, I think," Martin says without glancing up from his bulky paperback, *How to Make a Billion Pounds Without Leaving the Comfort of your Armchair*.

"Oh, come with us, darling. People will think Margaret and I are an item," Deirdre says, pinching his cheek.

"No, they won't," Martin's cheek veers away from Deirdre's fingers.

"Why do you have such lubley jubley cheeks if you won't let me pinch them?"

"I've no idea," Martin replies dryly. He grabs his book and takes the stairs two at a time, heading for the privacy of their bathroom.

Deirdre says Martin spends most of the day in the bathroom. She's considered setting up an office for him in what is now the airing cupboard. *He eats and reads sitting on the toilet*, she tells me. It's true; on the one occasion I've used their bathroom, I noted a plate with cake crumbs on a stack of books next to the lavatory.

I rarely go to the cinema with my own partner, Georgie.

"I'm a doer not a viewer," she says, as if cinema audiences are made up of slothful people with kitchen cupboards full of pop corn, crisps and a Slush Puppy machine by the fridge.

While Deirdre goes upstairs to disentangle her sheaf of blonde curls and choose between a black feather boa, which suits her, or Martin's twenty-year-old college scarf, which doesn't, I make myself comfortable on their white leather settee. I try not to dwell on Georgie. We are not seeing eye to eye at the moment. I think instead about my mother, who died a year ago this month, how she used to tell friends that Robert Mitchum could park his shoes under her bed any night of the week. This an impossibility, as mum's bed was divan-style, leaving only an inch between it and the carpet, about enough room for Robert Mitchum's spectacles. (*Parking his shoes* statement made after seeing RM in second *Cape Fear* with Robert De Niro, when RM was quite elderly.)

"Oh, please," interrupts Deirdre, (she's opted for the boa). "You've got that rotten reminiscing-about-dead-mother look on your face. Why can't you live in the here and now? How do I look?"

"Fabulous." (If somewhat over-dressed.) Black boa, silk trouser suit over magenta silk blouse. Whatever Deirdre says about living in the "here and now," she inhabits a glittering, fictional world where women go to their local Odeon dressed as if attending a London premiere. And why not?

She leans on the banister and shouts up, "Martin, it's your last chance to change your mind."

"Fuck off," he calls down, good-naturedly.

"I love it when he talks dirty, but I wish he'd shut the door when he's on the toilet."

Exit the two of us, laughing.

Deirdre and Martin have been together for over twenty years, and still he remains a source of wonderment and admiration to her. In Deirdre's opinion, Martin has the brains of Stephen Hawking, the looks of George Clooney, and the abilities of Jesus Christ (without the irritating compulsion to help the poor and needy).

As we walk from where we've parked the car to the cinema, Deirdre observes, as if it's been on her mind throughout the drive, "You know, he's an original. They broke the mould when they made my Martin."

Thank goodness for that.

I find myself resenting the way Deirdre has of holding Martin up as an example of perfection in a partner. Over the past months I've become increasingly monosyllabic about Georgie. What is there to say with any confidence? Never mind not seeing eye to eye, we hardly see each other at all. There's always something she must do immediately that doesn't concern me, in another town, another room, even in a separate Margaret-free space in her head.

However, I determinedly rally, and say, "Know what you mean, Deirdre. Georgie's pretty much a one-off kind of gal, as well."

Deirdre sniffs in disbelief.

I queue for the tickets. The film is *Pride and Prejudice*. The foyer's packed with women, a few men looking slightly adrift. There goes inimitable Deirdre battling through the melee to get to the ice creams. She flings open the door of the freezer and bawls across the crowd, "I'm having Bailey's. What flavour do you want?"

"Black forest gâteau," I bawl back.

From the freezer, she heads for the counter. She is a sizable woman wearing a mean, no-nonsense expression on her face - the group of sensibly-dressed middle-aged women fall back and let her push in front of them. She buys a large carton of toffee-flavoured popcorn plus an economy-size bag of M&M's. Going up the staircase to Cinema 1, I say, "I'm not fond of M&M's, Deirdre."

"Good," she says.

There's a cheeky, childlike quality to Deirdre's absolute commitment to putting herself first that amuses me. We choose our usual seats. When Martin is with us, he sits next to the aisle, then me in the middle, then Deirdre. Today I'm next to the

aisle, then Deirdre, then an empty seat, which pleases her, as she doesn't like the proximity of strangers.

"Bloody good job Martin didn't come with us - all these women would have given him the hee-bie-jeebies," Deirdre says through a mouth stuffed with popcorn.

Martin only likes people if they're in a club or a pub, but not at his table or standing too close to him at the bar. He doesn't much like men, because they make him feel competitive; he doesn't much like women, because they make him feel awkward. He quite likes me, because I'm a lesbian, a non-threatening hybrid. I think how very suited the two of them are, and how very comfortable I am sitting next to Deirdre. How equally comfortable I'd have felt sitting between her and Martin. Which of course brings me back to thinking about Georgie.

I'd have been consumed with anxiety sitting next to her, worrying that she wouldn't enjoy the film, would feel contempt for the audience. I'd never have opted for Black Forest Gateau ice cream. I'd have said, "Oh, vanilla, of course," in that strange gushy tone that takes over my voice when I'm trying to be the clever, refined woman I think she wants me to be.

A nudge from Deirdre, "On your marks," she says.

As always, we roar with laughter at the Orange advert, although we agree they're not as funny as they used to be. The best Orange adverts were when a romance seemed to be developing between the slimy, go-getting boss and his plain, equally slimy number two. Deirdre drags her feather boa under her nose and says, she doesn't remember anything like that happening.

Deirdre insists she loves "gay people." She just doesn't want them in her face all the time. Deirdre also agrees with my dead mum that the word "gay" used to be such a jolly, useful word, but, unlike my mum, she doesn't use it all the time to prove a point. Although old people can get away with that sort of thing, young people (Deirdre) would be considered weird.

Deirdre is one of my oldest friends. She has a pretty doll-like face, pink and white with china-blue eyes. A rosebud mouth helped along with bright pink lipstick. This lipstick lasts for eight hours and is a recent purchase from the Debenhams beauty counter. On Tuesday, she was able to eat five chicken wings and a large portion of chips for lunch, a curry for dinner from Bengali Nights, then share a box of twelve marshmallow tea cakes with Martin - lipstick remained in place. In fact, she says, it is very difficult to remove. Ever.

"Get stuck in," Deirdre says re: my ice cream

tub. She's finished hers.

I peel off the lid and try to make an exploratory incision with the plastic spoon. The ice cream is rock solid. I cradle the tub in my hand.

"It's not ready yet."

"Fuss-pot. Oh-oh, we're off."

She upends her tub over her face to catch the last drop of Bailey's. A rustle of excitement runs through the packed cinema, sweet wrappers are extinguished, conversations fade - here is Elizabeth Bennet played by Keira Knightly, here is Elizabeth Bennet's ramshackle family. Time passes. I am engrossed in the film, apart from an awareness of Deirdre's plump hand plying its way between the M&M's packet and her mouth. I'm hoping she's equally engrossed in the film. It isn't easy for Deirdre to become engrossed in anything. She admits to having "the concentration of a butterfly." She thinks it's proof of her extreme femininity.

Very slowly, she leans towards me and whispers, "She's got no bosoms."

"But she's very pretty," I whisper back.

"Do you think so? She reminds me of Winona Ryder and we all know what happened to her."

"Do we?"

A woman in the row behind hisses, "Shush."

"Shush yourself," Deirdre says, but subsides back onto her side of the arm-rest.

The awful match-making mother is played by Brenda Blethyn. I don't like her at all. I don't think I've ever seen her in a film when she's not making a lot of noise and screwing up her face.

"The penny's just dropped. The dad's Donald Sutherland. Hasn't he aged? Apart from his teeth."

I nod briskly and rearrange myself in the seat to discourage any further outburst from Deirdre.

"Do you think they're false?"

Ignore her. Privately agree that his teeth do look extraordinary. Disturbing. The kind of teeth you'd expect the Big Bad Wolf to have rather than fatherly Mr Bennet.

"What was that film where he was stabbed to death by the dwarf in the red sou'wester?"

"Will you be quiet?" the woman behind us says quite loudly. She lays a hand on Deirdre's silken shoulder, which is unwise.

'Oy, oy, oy," Deirdre says, "Who you molesting?"

Woman smartly removes her hand, "I'm merely asking you to keep quiet."

"Merely asking..." Deirdre mimics a posh voice completely unlike the woman's. "Actually it was more like telling, not asking at all."

From all sides of the audience we are now being shushed.

"That's enough Deirdre," I snap. "Sorry," I say

to the woman, and she smiles stiffly.

Deirdre subsides. Mouths "traitor" at me.

I try to concentrate on the film. Miss Bennet is dancing with Mr Darcy, who possesses a thunderous brow. However, there is a definite frisson of attraction between them, which is as it should be. Which prompts me to think of my all-time favourite cinematic coupling (romantic rather than carnal), Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, but I'm not allowed to think about them for long; Elizabeth Bennet is taunting Mr Darcy, who is looking even more troubled and thunderous. In fact, I could almost start laughing. Think irrelevantly that if the wind changes, he'll be sorry. Realise that, yes, Deirdre actually is laughing - more a disparaging chortle.

This film is not for her. Nobody has been shot, and she knows that nobody will be shot. There is nothing to look forward to, and she is a woman who likes to look forward. She bangs down the empty seat next to her and wedges her popcorn carton into an upright position so she can better rummage in her bag of M&M's. Bag suddenly splits and M&M's cascade onto the floor.

"Sod it," she says, and starts scrabbling after them.

I grab her arm. "Deirdre, no. It's filthy down there. You can't possibly eat sweets that have rolled on the floor."

"Try me." Her voice is muffled by hair, boa, and by her head plunging between her knees. I take hold of her shoulders and pull her back up. She blows out her cherub lips like a naughty, restless pony.

"Here, finish my tub," I offer.

She takes it.

"You're a slow coach," she says, "Ok, what's happening?"

"Romantic misunderstandings".

"Tell me about them."

"I just did."

I like the way Deirdre eats my ice cream with her mouth open like a child. And with disbelief on her face like a canny child.

"I can't get on with Keira," she whispers.

Find myself also dissatisfied with Keira Knightly - her ability to make her eyes fill with tears at every small setback. I'm also distracted by her eye-liner and the whites of her eyes being a little pink. Feel my own heroine Nicole Kidman... but stop myself from going any further, because Nicole is too old to play Elizabeth Bennet. Nicole is a woman and Keira is still a girl. Is that why I'm disenchanted? Because I like women now, not girls? Georgie is two years older than I am. I've noticed she watches younger women. Women who

are almost girls.

"Would he really fall in love with a woman with no bosoms?"

I whisper back, "Bosom's aren't everything."

"Get real. All men like bosoms, present company excluded."

"I'm not a man."

"You know what I mean."

"Actually, I don't. Sometimes, Deirdre, you can be very ignorant," I snap back.

"Ignorant. *Moi?*"

Behind us, the woman who'd complained, jumps up, grabs her coat and bag, and rushes up the aisle to the Exit.

"What's her problem?" Deirdre says. "Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but would any bloke go charging round the countryside in his dressing gown on behalf of Keira Knightly?"

"Martin might like her."

"Martin! My Martin? Would he have settled for these," she thumps her ample breasts, "if he'd wanted a stick-thin young girl?"

No time to reply, as a man in a cheap maroon dinner-jacket accompanied by complaining woman is shining a torch on us and saying urgently, "Come on. Out of it," as if he's discovered a couple of kids ripping up the seats.

"The film's not finished yet, mate," Deirdre says.

"I'm the manager, not your mate, and it has, as far as you're concerned."

"Me and my partner visit this cinema at least twice a week...."

"Well, you and your partner are barred from now on."

The woman says, "Actually, her partner wasn't the one making all the noise."

I smirk gratefully which I know isn't admirable. Deirdre shoots to her feet, sending a jet of M&M's and popcorn over the row in front, "Eeugh, she's not my partner," she squeals, "I'm not a bloody lezzar."

"Deirdre," I... expostulate.

From several rows back, someone lobbs an empty ice cream tub at her. She neatly bats it away and it flies past the manager's ear.

"You bloody fuckers," Deirdre shouts at everyone.

"You bloody lezzar," someone shouts back.

Deirdre, hands on hips, hair and boa in fabulous disarray, rounds on the disembodied voice, while behind her Mr Darcy embraces Elizabeth Bennet. "Do I look like a lesbian?" Deirdre demands.

"Yes!" the entire audience is in agreement.

"You bastards."

Deirdre pushes past me, past the manager,

who raises his torch as if fending off a blow, past the complainant, who is using the manager's body as a shield, and storms up the aisle accompanied by loud cheering and stamping of feet. Sheepishly, I follow her out. No cheer for me. A couple of boos, which I consider unfair.

We adjourn to the Tempo Coffee Lounge in the Precinct. Am considering whether to take Deirdre to task re: her anti-lesbian sentiments; however, she seems so cheerful, so energized, that I think, *What is the point?*

"Wasn't that a laugh?" she says, rubbing her hands gleefully, "Be honest. The film was utter crap. They should have got someone like Tom Hanks for Darcy. He'd have lightened things up. Now, who would you choose for Elizabeth Bennet? And don't say Nicole Kidman or Sharon Stone. Think while I ring Martin."

I try to think, but am distracted by two other Coffee Lounge customers at a table by the window. Man in anorak with a perfectly tempting fudge brownie on his plate, choosing to lick his female companion's ear. Force my attention back to Deirdre.

"We're in Tempo," she tells Martin, "Been chucked out of the cinema.... Having tea and cake.... See ya in five." Turns to me. "Look, I'm sorry about the lezzer stuff. I'd love to be a lezzer. I envy you and Georgie. Living with a man is no bed of roses. There - I've said I'm sorry and I always say I'll never say I'm sorry. Love is never having to say etcetera. Keep thinking. Carrot cake or coffee gateau?"

Have still not come up with a suggestion for Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy by the time Martin arrives. Toy with Fred and Ginger, but Deirdre and Martin will pooh-pooh that suggestion. Agree (with whom?) it is a mad idea, but it could have worked. Once Martin is comfortably settled behind his cappuccino and slab of Dundee Cake, Deirdre asks him which film-stars in the main roles might have persuaded him to see the film with us?

Quick as a flash he says, "Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis."

"Brilliant," Deirdre says.

"But weren't they in *Natural Born Killers*? I don't remember much 'romance' there."

"There was romance by the bucket," Deirdre says, "They were soul mates. How many times have we watched that film on DVD, Martin?"

"Dozens."

"We're just like Woody and Juliette, aren't we, darling?" she lunges across the table to pinch his cheek.

"Get off," he says, and knocks her hand away.

They drop me home. Georgie's already in bed. The bedroom light is off. I sit at the kitchen table for a while just thinking, chiefly about Martin and Deirdre; how she always wants to touch him, while he never wants to be touched. Yet they stay together, and the minute she'd telephoned, he'd dropped everything to come out and eat cake at ten o'clock at night. I think that if Deirdre ever stopped trying to pinch Martin's cheeks, he'd be really upset.

I feel quite glum, which makes me think of my childhood where my love of films and film-stars was first nurtured. Me and Mum living in a bare rented flat in North London. Sunday afternoons, I'd sit on the rug in front of the bar fire, my back against her chair, both of us watching Rita Hayworth, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Barbara Stanwyck movies on the television. Mum sniffing and searching for a tissue, wishing she'd been a film-star instead of getting married. Wrong decision. And then divorced. Wrong decision. But how could she tell at the time?

As I slip into bed beside Georgie, she wakes up and switches on the lamp.

"Well, how was your evening?" she asks.

"An enjoyable shambles," I say.

She shields her eyes with her hand. Whether the light is too bright, or whether my answer has irritated her, I can't tell. ■

The Beautiful and Damned

a brief introduction to the life and work of Amos Guttman

Nir Cohen

36

I WAS seventeen when I saw Amos Guttman's *Bar 51* for the first time. I don't remember if it was shown on Israeli TV, or whether I saw it on video, but I know I didn't mean to watch it, it happened accidentally, and my world was turned upside down. Not having a gay life myself, and feeding on mainstream media horror stories about the devious gay "cult," I was intimidated by the film's bleak depiction of gay life in Israel. I missed the humour and beauty hidden behind the darkness and the doom.

Trying to shake off my homosexuality, as well as my forced Israeli identity, *Bar 51* was a crude reminder of who I was and where I came from. In the film, a brother and sister involved in an incestuous relationship, an ageing cabaret dancer, and a flamboyant young gay man struggle through life on the margins of Tel Aviv, each with their own pathetic aspirations. I was a scared teenager when I watched it. And I was living in Israel, where militarism, machismo and chauvinism were sacred and celebrated values. The point *Bar 51* made, at least for me back then, was that anyone who is different pays a price.

Many years later I found myself writing extensively about Guttman's films. Being out for long enough, and having gained some confidence, I was more intrigued than shaken by his movies. Now, Guttman's attempt to do in Israel what Fassbinder – Guttman's mentor-figure – was doing in post-war Germany, seemed like something to admire. His films no longer frightened me; I was fascinated by their depiction of decadence, sorrow and pain, their camp sensibility, and the stylised photography.

Amos Guttman was born in Hungary in 1954 and moved with his family to Israel when he was seven. He grew up in Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel Aviv, and went to Beit Zvi Film School. He started out by directing short films – his first was in 1976 – which were followed by four feature films, the last of which came out in 1992 (see Filmography). Almost all his films are an autobiographical statement about growing up gay in Israel, being a gay filmmaker, being excluded from society, and about being HIV positive. Most of his films were made in the 1980s, a decade which marked the end of gay euphoria and the beginning of more committed political action. It was the time of The Smiths, Derek Jarman, Jimmy Somerville and John Waters. Everyone was political and angry back then, as was Guttman.

Throughout his career, and especially after his death in February 1993 at the age of 38, Guttman

was described as a gutter poet, a great filmmaker who portrayed his characters in a cruel, precise manner, and a brave artist who stood up to the imperviousness of Israeli society. By the time I rediscovered Guttman, Israel was, at least in some respects, a different place. Although still a harsh place, it became, almost miraculously, a gay-friendly country. I'd also changed. I'd discovered that there were more people like me out there, and moving from a suburban, middle-class town to Tel Aviv, I stopped worrying, more or less, what others thought of me. Gay love was no longer an oxymoron, even if it was still hard to find and sustain.

The process I went through to accept Amos Guttman's films and the reality they depicted, mirrored my own process of self-acceptance. It wasn't an easy journey. Granted, Guttman did have the tendency to over-sentimentalise the myth of the lonely pretty gay man, and his films were devoid of any kind of *jouissance*, but they did have a sense of humour and irony and they were wonderfully camp. In true post-modern fashion, Guttman mixed the trashy with the sublime, life in the cesspit with dreams of grandeur and glamour.

Like a lot of Israeli gay men and lesbians, Guttman's characters long to reinvent themselves in a far away country. The marks of his own foreignness followed Guttman throughout his life as badges of honour: his accent, his looks, his manners. As an outsider, not just in terms of his sexuality, but also in his appearance and behaviour, he found beauty and grace in the social circles mainstream Israel preferred to ignore. Not that it made him more empathic: his outsider's critical point of view was merciless and made him many enemies, including from inside the gay community.

Guttman's characters are in an endless dialogue with their Israeli identity. It often seems harder for them to accept their national, rather than their sexual identity: they're fine about being gay, it's just the attitude of their fellow Israelis they can't stand.

Bar 51's Zara and Israel are originally from Bat-Yam, a poor suburb south of Tel Aviv. The more Zara wants to run away and reinvent herself in America with her foreign, two-timing lover, the deeper she sinks into the low life of Tel Aviv. And Aranjuez, her sissy brother, Israel, doesn't find any redemption either through his new name and identity, but remains trapped in the margins of society, working in the sleazy Bar 51. In the same film, Apollonia Goldstein's name is as ironic as her appearance and gestures, suggesting a mix of

stylised artificiality and an unadorned banality.

Thomas, in Guttman's last film, *Amazing Grace* (1992), lives in New York, but can't find happiness there. Struggling with his illness, he tells Jonathan, who hopes to study music in New York, how he left Israel for a similar dream but had to abandon it to work in a restaurant instead.

Zara, Thomas, Aranjuez, Apollonia – Guttman's characters all have non-Hebrew names – have great plans to conquer the world, to create new lives for themselves, but they can hardly get away from the deprived suburbs of Tel Aviv. They make for a powerful cinematic experience: you're simultaneously repelled by, and sympathetic towards their characters. You don't want to be like them, but you see large parts of yourself in them. Guttman's films highlight the ambiguity and uncertainty that go into constructing a gay identity in an unwelcoming society, and a national identity in what is often perceived, by Israelis, as a hostile world. His films express a sense of pride as much as they are seeped in self-loathing.

Although he never really made it commercially, Guttman was probably one of the biggest gay cultural icons in Israel (along with Dana International!). He was talented, bold, decadent and beautiful: a rebel with a cause. He was also, until the mysterious death of Ofra Haza, the most well-known figure to die of AIDS in Israel. But, whereas Haza kept her medical condition a secret, Guttman put his on the screen. *Amazing Grace* (1992) was probably his biggest achievement. Shortly after its last screenings in theatres in Israel, Guttman died.

In the film, Guttman weaves a complex network of familial relationships. Two dysfunctional families, both with a gay son; one is HIV-positive, the other could be after the two boys have had sex. As in Guttman's previous films, the fathers are absent and the mothers can't help their children cope with misery and illness. *Amazing Grace* is Guttman's tribute to classic melodramas like Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959).

Guttman believed that the broken nuclear family could not be fixed or replaced by the alternative Israeli gay family. He rejected the gay community as much as its members rejected him, even though he was one of a handful of artists who dared to come out publicly long before Israel's big gay revolution took off in the late 1980s. His loathing of the false, politically-correct image the gay community tried to create for itself and its submission to the Zionist master-narrative is

articulated in all his films. In *Drifting* (1983), his first feature film, Robi takes a Palestinian man home and asks him to fuck him. Renouncing his alleged superiority as a "white" Jew, Robi gives himself over to the pleasure of being dominated, undermining both the Zionist discourse and the gay community's demand for a clean-cut, respectable image.

Guttman's public coming-out may have been an uncommon act at the time, but he never used it to create and deliver "clean" images of gay life, even if he was the first Israeli filmmaker to bring openly gay characters to the screen. Like Fassbinder before him, Guttman's characters are as flawed, imperfect and cruel as the rest of us. Not only do they struggle with their sexual identity, they often lose the battle. All his feature films, apart from *Drifting*, end with a death, an obsession of Guttman's long before the AIDS epidemic.

Guttman's films didn't make me happy, and they didn't make me proud, but they played a part in forming the person I am today. I grew to like and respect his movies because I grew to like and respect my desires. Those films, which used to be a constant reminder of why I felt guilty and ashamed of myself, have become a source of consolation. They no longer scare me. I'm different, and feminine, and queer. So what?

Guttman's career ended prematurely. Like many gay filmmakers before him – Pasolini, Fassbinder, Jarman – he didn't stay long enough to see how radically the gay movement has changed and how far we've come. I'm not sure how happy he would have been about it, though. ■

37

Filmography

- Hessed Mufla (Amazing Grace)*, 1992
- Himmo, Melech Yerushalyim (Himmo, King of Jerusalem)*, 1987
- Bar 51*, 1986
- Nagua (Drifting)*, 1983
- "Nagua" (*Drifting*), 1979
- "Makom Batuah" (*A Safe Place*), 1977
- "Premierot Hozrot" (*Repeat Premiers*), 1976

Scenes Remembered

Robin Whitmore

The Knife Scene (Claire)

...mad Margaret the cleaner from the Sun Hill Station...she's obviously slashed her wrists and she trying to kill herself... to commit suicide... so Perkins (Terry) tries to stop her and there's a struggle and he tries to grab the knife out of her hand and then ends up getting stabbed himself and he slumps to the ground between the toilet and the bath, which isn't a very nice place to slump, but he's slumped on the ground, clutching his stab-wound, bleeding to death, and he's getting paler and paler. Margaret's just standing there clutching the knife... so she's just standing there in the doorway covered in blood, in the hallway, staring at him and he keeps trying to get her to ring for help, for the ambulance, but she's too barmy to do that, perhaps she's too in shock.

But he always wears this jacket cos I remember cos it's the one that the undertaker in East London wore when I saw him on the telly on the news once. It stuck in my mind. I don't know if that's why I like him as a character cos he reminds me of that undertaker... It's Ramini's house so it's all very tidy it's like a trendy middleclass type person's house. It's sort of light colour whitey sort of clean normal person's type of bathroom yeh I think there's a window up here actually yeh cos I think it was shining light on his poor pallid face. I did wonder whether he was dead or not, though, for quite a few days, and I had to wait a week to see what had happened to him and then I went out that night and missed that episode...

38



The Beach Scene (Fionna)

...there's this man walking across a beach and he... he's quite... he's the main sort of person in the film... and you're... the main man... he's very out of place on this beach cos all the holiday-makers are there and they're all in their... they're all in their summer gear, and there's lots of noises of people, you know the sort... if you hear them... sort of at a distance... almost the noises of people at the beach and the sea and the children and he... he's dressed in his mack, he's got his mack on and he's... he'd be in his probably maybe fifties, sixties and he's got a rolled up umbrella to walk around with... and the main thing about it was that I remember this man walking around the place on his tiptoes, like he'd go up on his feet and back down... well, I got taken to see it was probably

something like Bambi or a Disney film when I was little and this image of this man... so anyway, there was this B-Movie on before the main feature and I just remember... it just stuck in my memory this image of this man walking across a beach on his tiptoes and I never knew it sort of was like it stuck itself on my memory and then years later... and I sometimes thought, God, I wonder what that was that movie or that person that was in that movie, and then years later I happened to see the film and I looked and I saw it and I thought, God, that's who it was, and that's the film that I saw as a kid and it was *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*... *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*...



39

At the 2005 Galway Film Fleadh members of the public were invited to recall a scene from a film or TV drama that had left a powerful impression on them. The images were my attempt to recreate that memory as accurately as possible based on their description. RW

Cheap Porn

Michael Hyde

TWO HUNDRED yards further down City Road, I walk past the door and on to the next intersection, looking up and down as if I am not sure where I am. I head back, trying to slow myself down, past the blacked-out windows and through the door marked Members Only. At the end of a dimly-lit passageway, two middle-aged men are smoking and playing cards, paper cups of weak tea sit in the middle of a desk littered with McDonalds cartons and used tea bags. Behind them, three screens: two porn films, and a documentary about giant tortoises.

"Alright, son?" the man in a beige tank-top looks up.

I'm 42. I pay him.

"You got a number?"

"No," I say, and give my name as Hyde

He writes it in capitals on his list. I enjoy the sound of that name. It's what I'm called and what I do. He doesn't know it's not my name. What if there was a fire, and I died? How would anyone know who I was?

I stuff my jacket and pullover into a bag full of work letters and final demands. I don't want the smell of the place to be obvious when I leave.

My pulse quickens as I walk down the few steps into the dark. The smell is of stale sweat and tobacco, poppers and cum. I check the screens. The larger of the two, with standing room at the back, is showing a woman in black high heels and peroxided hair, makeup smeared on her studded collar, forcing two women with breast implants to go down on one another.

I move to the other screen with the closed-off corridor behind it, the smaller of the two, showing a film about porn auditions, and lean against the No Standing sign to look at the other punters. The straight guys sit at the front, with all the action going on further back. The place is rough. You are never going to see beauty here. There are the usual old guys sitting in the back row. A young, skinny, East End lad with a pockmarked face is being blown by a fat man with just wisps of hair over his ears. The young guy keeps his face on the screen, doesn't look at what's being done to his dick, or at any of the men watching his crotch. He doesn't want to see their expressions, that mixture of envy and pity.

The balding man sits up and tries to kiss the younger man's face. The lad moves his head away, but obviously without enough conviction, because the older one goes for his mouth. The young guy pulls violently away and stands up, briefly revealing a long, pale cock, only half erect, before shov-

ing it back into his jeans and walking out. The fat man watches him exit, then settles back down to watch the film.

Most of the eyes I look into are empty, unreadable, a few are hungry or wary. I try to look as nonchalant as possible, but find myself constantly scanning the room. A Black guy from the City walks out. One of those tight bodies in a decent suit. The kind of body so many Black men have without trying. His eyes hadn't wavered from the screen, and when he left I'd caught the glint of a wedding ring.

The two muscled guys fucking the girl on the screen pull out of her cunt and arse and shoot into her mouth, the one with the smaller cock producing a quantity that makes the girl shriek as it shoots into her eye and up her nose. The guy wipes the cum across her cheek and into her mouth with his dick, then thumps it up and down on her tongue as an afterthought. When he's finished, he moves out of shot, leaving the girl looking blankly past the camera. Realising what she's meant to be doing, she gives the camera her version of a sexy look, opening her mouth and licking at the cum that glistens around her lips.

With the cum-shot done, those hungry for more move through to the other screen. I go with them, but via the closed-off corridor behind the auditorium, past the Asian guy with his hand on his crotch, guarding the exit like a doorman, checking at regular intervals to see if there's any action back there. Round the corner, a small group of men is watching a middle-aged guy being fucked loudly by someone who looks like a bank clerk. His work suit still on, but with his shirt pulled out and unbuttoned, he smacks the arse he is pounding, and, enjoying the effect on the group, does it again and again, until the skin is red and a hand comes back to protect one buttock, the other hand still taking the weight on the wall.

An onlooker tries pinching an exposed nipple, but the man in the suit swats the hand away. I slide past, fielding the hands on my crotch, forcefully removing them by the wrist. I look to where the two men are joined. Skin on skin. No condom. If they'd have been good-looking I would have stayed to watch or join in. As I leave the corridor I hear the suited guy behind me shouting as he ejaculates into the other's arse. "Yeah, take my load! Take my fucking wad up your arse."

Too many hours of watching cheap porn, I think.

I walk through to the other screen, behind the last row of seats, peering into the dark to see faces. Six or seven guys, all much older than me,

two of them with their dicks out, looking for takers. Nothing for me, but I stay, standing in the middle of the space. Leaning against the wall is an invitation to be sucked off; leaning forward against the seats is asking to be fucked. I want both, but I have standards. Standards that tend to drop the longer I'm here.

The guy standing behind the last seat is a regular. Mid-sixties, grey hair slicked over his bald patch. A faded camisole on his top half, and lower, a pair of old lace knickers, a suspender belt and cream stockings disappearing into his dropped trousers and battered brown trainers. He turns his head every few seconds and shifts the weight onto the other leg to draw attention to his white arse. In all the times I have been here – twenty or thirty – I have only seen him get fucked once, by a thin man in glasses who hung on to him like an excited dog, licking his ears with a dark red tongue.

The older man had had his face to the screen, his mind somewhere else, silently accepting the other guy's cock, oblivious to the grunts and laboured panting behind him. Was he thinking of a past lover? Feeling young again? Or was he horrified to be so desperate for love that he'd allow anyone to use his body?

The man fucking him had come, pulled up his underwear and trousers, his condom still on, and walked away, glancing right and left for signs of admiration. The fact that none were forthcoming hadn't seemed to diminish his look of triumph as he'd climbed the stairs breathlessly to get back out onto the street.

On the screen, a woman has just driven to a garage to have her car fixed. The mechanics outnumber her five to one. One of them points at something under the bonnet, so she has to lean forward, her short skirt riding up. In the auditorium, the usual game of musical chairs is being played out. A guy sits on his own and undoes his trousers. One of the standing men sits next to him, so the guy gets up and moves to a new seat. The game stops only when someone gets lucky. The man stays put and a different game begins. The two face the screen.

First comes the Knee Press. One moves a knee, barely touching the other's. If the guy doesn't move, it is pressed harder to confirm intent. This is usually followed by the Thigh Stroke, which proceeds quickly to the Dick Fumble. A belt will be undone, trousers pushed slightly down, and a head will disappear from view, the other face concentrating hard on the screen.

I'm distracted by the smell of poppers being snorted by a man on his knees in the corner behind me, an assortment of cocks waving in his face. He gobbles three of them, snuffling from one to another, holding two while he chews on the third, scared they might move away before they come. His head bobs frantically, as he grunts over his prizes. Another mouth is offered and he loses one of his cocks to the newcomer. His remaining two are losing interest; the new mouth belongs to a younger guy with more pulling power. But the young man is only interested in the dick he's already sucking on, which belongs to a guy who looks like an uncle of mine, Uncle Paul, tall and dark with a West Ham shirt over navy joggers. His cock curves gently to one side and has a furry sac with heavy balls. The thick head glistens with saliva each time he pulls out of the kneeler's mouth.

I catch Uncle Paul's eye. He looks back. I can't tell if he's interested or just wants to gloat. I trace the outline of my cock through my jeans, and he raises his eyebrows. I push through to the door, glancing back from the threshold. He's still looking.

I wait outside the door to see if he will follow. He does. I pretend I haven't noticed and head for the back corridor. Through the door and round the corner. It is empty. I find a spot where the floor and walls are clear of cum, just at the edge of the light from a single bulb. I hear the door open. He stops for a second as we eye one another. We both feel at our crotches and he walks over. He goes for my cock while I play with his nipples through the claret and blue shirt. With the last guy, Uncle Paul was in charge; with me, he kneels down and follows the outline of my cock with his teeth, the denim darkening as his tongue licks the head.

He undoes the buttons while I unfasten my belt. He pulls my jeans down to my thighs so my cock springs up – no underwear – and he takes it into his mouth. No finesse. He starts by working up and down the shaft, his tongue flicking my piss slit on each withdrawal. I don't want to come quickly, so I pull at his shirt and he stands up. I go down on him, try to show him how to slow things down, run my tongue up from his balls to the head of his cock. He moans as I manoeuvre the slight curve down into my throat, then let his cock leave my lips, a thread of thick saliva still joining us. I lap at it, then move down to his sac, taking his balls one at a time into my mouth, rolling my tongue around them, coating them with spit, then poking my nose under and licking between his thighs. He lifts his balls so I can reach further with my tongue. I flick it out as far as I can, tracing the

ridged seam leading to his arse.

I twist his hips to see if he is willing. He doesn't resist, so I turn him round and bury my face in his crack, my tongue against his hole, which is wet with sweat and sickly bitter. I lick over and past his sphincter. He leans forward against the wall as I spread his cheeks, my tongue opening him up. He bends further and fishes in a pocket. He hands me a condom. No lube. I roll the condom on and spit into his hole. I put two fingers down the back of my throat for thick mucus and use it to push one, then two fingers up through the muscle and into him. I watch my fingers going in and out of his arse, spitting on them as his ring loosens.

"How do you want it?" I say, leaning closer to his ear.

"Gently," he says. "Gently".

Five or six men have gathered, keeping their distance, so I lift my t-shirt over my head to expose as much of my body as possible. I love being watched. I want these men to get off on seeing me fuck this guy.

I push slowly into him, enjoying the resistance, then feeling the thick band giving way as the head of my dick becomes adamant. The guy gasps, and a hand comes back to grab my thigh.

"Slowly!" he whispers.

I stay still, letting him get used to the burn, knowing what he is feeling, then I push in further. His hand grips tighter on my thigh, so I pull back, then push in again, the head forcing back the walls of his arse until I feel his skin against my pubes. He lets out a moan, and suddenly there is movement from the onlookers, who seem to have been collectively holding their breath while I entered him. They shift tentatively forward. I vary the tempo and the angle to find out what will make him groan, and when I find it, I keep to it, making him cry out, wanting him to feel that pain, the pain that is not pain, that you want to stop, but not stop, that you feel from your arse through your balls to the end of your dick. He is open now and I can push in harder, go deeper. An anonymous hand presses a bottle of poppers to my nostrils. The onlookers move in and suddenly it seems like a hundred hands are pinching my nipples and caressing my stomach and arse.

I am lost in the fuck. I am in Rome. I am in Athens. I am the master fucking his slave, a gladiator fucking his opponent, adored by the crowd. The guy I'm fucking stands and says he's going to shoot. All heads turn to his cock. He closes his eyes, throws his head back, and yells as the cum spurts onto the wall and the floor, his arse clamp-

ing down on my cock as his body spasms.

I know I should stop and pull out because he's finished, but I can't, I'm not ready to. I can feel the sensation starting, as his hand reaches back to clutch at my thigh, signalling me to stop. The back of my throat tightens, and I slow down, prolonging the moment. The only sense I have left is touch. My whole body is my cock. I want to keep it slow, but my dick takes over, driving into him. I shove his head back down and push in as hard and deep as I can. It takes me over the top. My back arches and I shout and stay inside him. The onlookers shuffle their feet. They wanted to see the money-shot. I pull out slowly and the heads crane to look at the condom, to see how the weight of my cum is making it hang like a plumb line.

The crowd vanishes back to the screens in search of other live acts. As the guy pulls his trousers up, I notice he's lost any resemblance to my uncle Paul; he seems shorter now, his fingers stained with nicotine. I carefully wipe my cock with a tissue, then throw it on the floor. Those moments of being wanted, the feeling of being loved, have gone. I mumble thanks and rub his shoulder as I head for the door.

I walk back upstairs, put on my pullover and jacket, sling my bag over my shoulder. There are cheetahs on the screen, the McDonalds wrappers have been cleared away. Outside it is cold. The man selling flowers in front of Angel Tube Station is locking up his shed. I spend the train journey home making up the story I will tell my wife - a meeting that overran, a bomb alert on the Tube - because I am late home from work again. ■

Happy Slapping

Andra Simons

"I'm ready for my close up..."

my lover loves the colour purple
his fist dips his brush and paints my cheek
with such a regal palette
queen for the day... I am
when mourning comes
my crown will be gone

I smiled once for the hospital shots
a broad missed toothed instant in time
enough for me to capture
a throbbing heart
on an unsteady frame of film

Rec

he led me midst
fragments of us...
rose petals or
droplets from cut lips
strewn over the bedroom floor

studio set lit for maximum effect
furious fucking
left me purple bracelets, broach, and choker
to compliment my eyes

if I weren't a man, I'd swear I was my mother

Rec

"Let's remember this moment forever..."

he kisses me tenderly...
a threat or
a six inch blade across my ego

I move wide...
a panoramic panning shot or
a palm sweeping in for the meteoric impact

unable to navigate the room
falling on the floor or
more in love with him

he pulls out of his pocket unprompted
regrets the size of 5p coins or
his modern mobile phone

it grabs hold my moving image
like a scared hand or
my blushed throat

in a whisper
he speaks commitment

a softer sound
this northern side of him
an eroded face on the sheltered shoreline
I reach... for
another unfocused glassed picture for the hall
another shrill call flung
distant dimmed star against
the wall...

Rec

44

Miklós Rózsa's Score for *Double Indemnity* Tim Robertson

A slug-it-out march to MURDER! on drums and brass,
a fanfare to nothing, a headline,
recoils to a shudder of cellos, then builds again – SMASH!
until Fred MacMurray's story is launched, unwinds

in delicate ostinati, tripping along,
nearly Prokofiev's Peter
skipping along,
a bit off-kilter,

his coupe drawn through sunburnt urban fringe
to pause, turn, glide up the drive and meet
Barbara Stanwyck's long, slow, low strings –
adagio swellings, part venom, half sweet

that infiltrate this conservatory voice of wise, symphonic, Hungarian commentary,
seduce it into conspiracy.

Rushes

Cherry Smith

1

That you could handle film was like touching God. That you could lift a spool in your white cotton fingers from its can, from the tower of cans, and thread it onto the Steenbeck was like showing how God moves. I watched you in the dark make thousands of tiny decisions of light.

2

From spool to empty spool, the images clattered, a baggy ribbon of blurred flickers that you paused, lifted the hood, and lined the strip with china marker. You pulled the film out of the gate towards you like two elastic arms and settled it on the metal cutting block. You spliced and taped and fed the scene back, a minute shorter. You numbered the end, fastened it to a bull-clip and hung it on a hook on the wall, or slid it into a suspended cloth bag for trims. Then you clicked down the hood and made the movie move again.

3

You'd sit at the edge of your seat. You couldn't hear anything else when you were editing. The images were sound that needed an exact rhythm, a melody only you could detect. You knew to cut just before it seemed to need it, your attention fastidious. Thelma Schoonmaker sat at your right shoulder. When we watched *La Regle du Jeu* I didn't flinch as the dozen rabbits and birds were shot. You'd taught me to go inside the cuts – 102 in 4 minutes – counting Renoir's rhythm, defined by Marguerite Houlet, his editor and lover at the time.

4

We'd flirted at a feminist film group. I'd noticed your walk – a loping swagger on long legs in tight jeans. The static between us made me giggle so much I had to leave the room. You didn't want a relationship. I made you have one. We met in unadorned rooms in Soho, in basements, or at the end of a grey corridor where daylight never arrived. The sun burnt a bar of gold on the ceiling or the wall where the blackout curtain didn't quite close. In these dark and smoky places, you showed me what made you, making sense of every film I'd ever liked, teaching me why, giving my passion a possible world. We never once had sex there. You were paying by the hour.

5

Film buffs were men. With beards and BO. We were cinema fiends. There were no videos or DVDs. There was the ceremony of cinema. A von Trotta Double Bill at the Academy; a Bergman

Triple at the Electric; midnight cults at the Scala; Monday nights at the Everyman. We travelled, stayed awake, skived off work because there were films to be seen. I'd smuggle in a bowl of finely chopped, dressed salad, fresh bagels and two forks, and we'd sit in silence nourishing ourselves for hours. You never stood up until the last credit, as if by reading each name, honouring each member of the crew, you could absorb their skill, their magic.

6

You were in love with many women, always. You appreciated them like a connoisseur of fine liquors with a longing roll of the eyes and a small gasp: Gena Rowlands in *Woman Under the Influence*, Bernadette Lafont in *La Fiancée du Pirate*, Giulietta Masina in *Nights of Cabiria*, Sophia Loren and Catherine Deneuve in anything. You were a big flirt and a big fan and I didn't realise then how much humility and forgiveness that required.

You forgave Deneuve her bad plots and her love affairs with ugly, much older men; you forgave me my younger women. You were capable of devotion. You knew the difference a 25th of a second could make to a glance across a crowded bar.

7

You were a celluloid master. I bowed at your feet. Once you rescued a bored porn star from another bad movie, devising a way she could cut herself free from the film strip and escape on the back of your motorbike. No one believed it would work. Or the 16mm feature you made of the threesome you were living in, in a flat in Warren Street in the early 80s. You ate only toast and tepid tea. But women always fed you more.

8

You gave me a Super 8 to take to Russia, showed me how to use it. I carried it like a baby. I shot blossoms falling in a Moscow park, a gigantic mural on the dull outskirts, a sudden heap of tomatoes for sale on the roadside. I couldn't film people. The camera was a gun I couldn't point. I couldn't see a whole from parts, came home with short unfinished poems. I don't know where that footage is. In a grey can somewhere, held closed with white tape with my name on it, on a shelf in some dusty cutting room. ■

For Jacqui Duckworth, director of "An Invitation to Marilyn C", Home-Made Melodrama, "A Prayer Before Birth", and "A Short Film About Melons".

A Dream Deferred?

Inge Blackman

DURING THE two years I programmed the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (2004–2005) I did not receive a single submission from Black or Asian filmmakers in the UK. I was the first person of colour in the Festival's twenty-year history who'd been acknowledged as a programmer, and as most of my work is concerned with exploring narratives about people of colour and LGBT people in particular, I was anxious to see these stories on the screens of the National Film Theatre.

I trawled through universities and colleges in the UK and found nothing. I did however find Arabic-descent lesbians in Switzerland, Indian women filmmakers in India, African gay men and lesbians from South Africa, and, as usual, a good number from the USA and Canada. Themes varied from questioning gender identities to coming out, and from domestic violence, spirituality and traditions to just plain love stories. But from the UK – silence.

I asked myself if anyone still wanted to make films in the UK. Did they want to, but lacked the confidence? Is equipment still too expensive? Or, now that we see LGBT people of colour on TV and film, do we no longer care who tells our stories, just as long as they're there? Is there still a complex matrix of white privilege and post-modern sleight of hand that makes it difficult to get funding for queer work authored by people of colour in the mainstream film and TV industries and the independent sector?

I didn't think there would ever be such a queer film desert when in 1990, as an apprentice in the film industry, I was taken to see Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* (1988), a film about the poet Langston Hughes. It blew me away. I realised then that it was both possible and legitimate to tell Black queer stories on the big screen: that as queer people of colour we did not have to filter our ethnicity from our sexualities.

The pressure to choose between our allegiances to our parents' cultures and the "gay" culture we adopt, is a perennial dilemma for many Black and Asian LGBT people in the UK. Underlying it all is a basic human need for somewhere we can call home, somewhere to belong. We often feel that in order to belong to the dominant queer culture we must take on white European Christian models of aesthetics and socialising; values which are sometimes in direct conflict with our learned cultural values. We also know that it is sometimes a struggle to be "out and proud" in our minority communities, and nearly impossible to find queer minority stories and histories in cinema or on television.

Looking for Langston was a landmark. It was the first British film to draw together all the influences, both historical and contemporary, about African gay male lineage. Julien skilfully combined visuals and sound to capture the specificity of African-descent homoerotic desire. Using Hughes' poems, he also portrayed the closeted poet's desire for men and combined the poems with texts from out African gay poets like Essex Hemphill. Julien showed that homosexuality was not "white people's nastiness" and that non-white LGBT cultures had unique languages, histories and traditions that were different from the majority white gay culture.

I didn't realise at the time that *Looking for Langston* was the beginning of a short burst of queer filmmaking of colour that would peak only a few years later. It seemed then as if things could only get better for Black and Asian filmmakers wanting to tell similar stories. In the 1990s our dreaming began in earnest that the cinematic representation of Britain and Britishness and homosexuality was going to be challenged by lesbians and gay men. Ironically, the foundation for this hope had been laid about ten years previously by a hostile Conservative government.

Most of the funds that enabled viewers to access this queer material in our homes came initially from Channel 4 Television. Created in 1982 by an Act of Parliament led by Margaret Thatcher, Channel 4 had a remit to provide for those audiences that were not catered for by the other terrestrial channels; ie. minority constituents: women, gays, ethnics, politicians. It was set up as a tough challenge to the terrestrials, and was predicted to fail. Being Thatcher's bastard child, the Channel stuck two fingers up at the Conservative establishment. Funded by revenue from the ITV franchises and with no direct responsibility to advertisers, it could afford to be the *enfant terrible* of broadcasting. Channel 4 was experimental, challenging and innovative – too much so for some viewers.

In the 1980s, Britain appeared to be in revolution and in flux, and British nationhood was up for grabs. Geographic and psychic territories were being renegotiated and contested by first- and second-generation immigrants of colour. Inner-city areas with large immigrant communities in London and Liverpool were gripped by violent street riots. Disenfranchised youths, many from ethnic minorities, went on the rampage in Toxteth, Brixton, and Handsworth to express their frustration at being constantly policed, treated like criminals, and discriminated against in the job market.

Lord Scarman was appointed to determine why minority communities felt they had to riot to be heard by the establishment. Among his recommendations to improve trust between the police and minority ethnic communities was his advice to recruit more Black and Asian officers, a step which led indirectly to the creation of the Police Complaints Authority.

And there was AIDS. Mass hysteria engendered through fear and ignorance meant that many people, including some health care professionals, were afraid to touch anyone infected with HIV. Without the development of retroviral drugs, being HIV positive would almost certainly lead to death. In the UK, TV adverts with falling tombstones reinforced the grim reaper analogy. Gay people could roll over and play dead or fight back.

Some artists and filmmakers used their anger to create works which articulated their frustration. To be out in your work was to stand up and be counted, to be outed was to be scorned. Derek Jarman was a poster boy for a generation of (white) queer filmmakers who were uncompromising in their queer political filmic visions. Others included Richard Kwietniowski, Stuart Marshall and Constantine Giannis, some of whose films were funded by Channel 4, others they self-financed.

In 1986, in response to the body of work being created by film and video artists and directors, the first London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival was set up. These filmmakers were the people I looked up to and wanted to emulate, but until I saw Isaac's work, I didn't even have a language to express my(Black)self artistically.

The mid-1980s also saw the rise of the independent film workshop movement set up through the ACTT Workshop Declaration and funded by Channel 4 and the Greater London Council. The workshops were created to provide new structures and working methods for filmmakers who chose to work outside the mainstream film and broadcasting industries.

The Black workshops that came out of this environment included Ceddo Film and Video, Black Audio Film Collective, Sankofa Film and Video Collective and Retake Film and Video. These workshops made films that challenged the dominant ideologies of (white) cinema. Arguably, the extreme right-wing political context at this time acted as a catalyst for the production of politically and aesthetically uncompromising films that challenged white supremacy, dominant gender relations, and homophobia. Sankofa Film and Video Collective, however, was the only

workshop to make any gay work.

In 1989 Channel 4 upped the ante by commissioning *Out on Tuesday*, and in one click, gay stories were now in your face and on the telly. Not to mention those of our parents', too! In the five years the series ran, filmmakers of colour, such as Pratibha Parmar, Isaac Julien, Sonali Fernando, Topher Campbell, Rita Smith and myself were commissioned to make short documentaries. It really looked as if the film and TV industries were finally opening up to racial and sexual diversity and trying to move beyond empty tokenistic gestures.

Using *Out on Tuesday* as a springboard, Pratibha Parmar produced "Flesh and Paper" (1990), a film about the writer Suniti Namjoshi, and "Khush" (1991), a documentary about diasporic South Asian lesbians and gay men. Parmar's work is driven by rigorous academic thought and a strong belief in the ideology and politics of lesbian feminism and ethnicity as mobilising forces for creativity. As a highly committed lesbian artist, she has a loyal international following and has received consistent critical acclaim for both her films and academic writing. Parmar has moved into drama, and is currently shooting the UK's first Asian lesbian feature, *Nina's Heavenly Delights*, set in Scotland.

After *Looking for Langston*, Isaac Julien directed the feature *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) about two gay pirate radio DJs, one of whom gets arrested for a homophobic murder. Julien's lyrical documentary, *The Darker Side of Black* (1994), explored ragga music and homophobia. But chasing funds for further features proved difficult and Julien moved into the gallery space, which was friendlier to difference in terms of identity and narrative forms. Using the camera as a chisel, Julien's work is characterised by detail to beauty and scrutiny of the Black body. He is Britain's most successful Black queer artist filmmaker and his gallery works include installations like "Long Road to Mazatlan" (1999), "Vagabondia" (2000) and more recently "Fantôme Créole" (2005). In 2001 he was shortlisted for the Turner Prize.

Other filmmakers of colour came in at the tail-end of Channel 4's gay TV orgy, many to make films about reclaiming history. I was commissioned to direct a film about Black lesbian history and stories, "BD Women" (1994), which won a Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame Award; Black lesbian poet and philosopher, Audre Lorde, was eulogised in Sonali Fernando's "Body of a Poet" (1995); Topher Campbell directed "Homecoming" (1996), a film about the queer photographer,

Ajamu X, and his quest for a place to call home.

A major breakthrough came about in 2001 when Rikki Beadle Blair directed, wrote and starred in the television series *Metrosexuality* about a polyracial, pansexual London community. Beadle Blair, who co-wrote the critically-acclaimed feature *Stonewall* (1995), already had a successful reputation as a screen and theatre writer. His recent play, *Bashment* (2005), deals with queerbashing, dancehall, homophobia and queer love, and is part of Beadle Blair's general change in focus away from films to theatre, where the boundaries of colour and culture seem easier to shift.

The theatre is seeing a consistent growth of Black gay writers/directors creating for the stage: Paul Boakye's *Boy with Beer* (1995) explores the clash of class and culture; Steven Luckie's *Talking about Men* has guys tell revealing stories in a sauna, and his *Junior's Story* (2005) deals with a young Black rent boy; Chris Rodriguez's *High Heels Parrot Fish* (2005) is about a drag show in Trinidad; Queenie's *Sin Dykes* (1998) breaks taboos around lesbian sexuality; and Troy Fairclough's *You Don't Kiss* (2002) follows three Black gay men in their search for love.

By 2000, identity politics had begun to unravel and people were questioning the labels. Is "gay" really shorthand for "gay white culture"? If feminism is about liberating all women, why are certain women still privileged over others? AIDS – no longer the "gay disease" – is devastating people of colour in First and Third World countries. The clear lines between "oppressor" and "oppressed" drawn by identity politics appear to be dissolving. It has become more important to examine what someone believes, rather than who they're fucking or the colour of their skin.

Britain in the 21st Century is more at ease with issues of sexuality, race and ethnicity than twenty years ago. A person of colour is now more likely to be accepted as British. White urban British people quote chicken tikka masala as their national dish and use Jamaican patois and Bengali slang unselfconsciously and with meticulous pronunciation. The public have voted for a gay man and a transsexual to win *Big Brother!* The vindictive Section 28 has been repealed, and gay men and lesbians can now enter into civil partnerships. Homosexuals and their stories are *de rigueur* in mainstream television and cinema programmes.

Even minority ethnic gays are being included: Asher D from So Solid Crew plays a gay man in *Holby*; Marcell McCalla plays a gay footballer

outed by *The Sun* in *Footballers' Wives*; Ofo Uhiara plays a gay character in *The Bill*, who marries his (white) lover. And Andrew Mundy-Castle, a Black heterosexual man, has recently directed a self-financed short called "Twice as Hard" (2005) about perceptions of male homosexuality in the Black community that will screen at this year's London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. It seems homosexual representation in communities of colour is no longer quite so scary even for actors or filmmakers who aren't gay.

The digital revolution has also enabled filmmakers to make their own movies with MiniDV cameras and relatively inexpensive editing software. I was able to finance, with the help of friends, "Paradise Lost" (2003), a documentary about homosexuality in the Caribbean. And Topher Campbell has produced "Don't Call Me Battyman" (2004) about dance hall culture and homophobia. And yet, with this access and tolerance, there is still not a wealth of material, and funding is still non-existent.

As we ease on down the yellow brick road to the Emerald City of mainstream acceptance we should remember that the Wizard wasn't all he was cracked up to be. The conventions of dominant cinema and television haven't really changed, and even though we see more Black and queer faces, the people making the programmes and controlling the imagery still bow to white supremacist beliefs and hetero-normative ideology.

We must examine closely what we're sacrificing in order to be "accepted" by dominant cultures. Those who feel smug because they're allowed to sup at "Massa's table in the Great House" should look to see who is being left out in the cold. Ancient conflicts are being replayed like those between Islam and Christianity and the values of the Occident versus the Orient. And the "War on Terror" is where those historical lines of conflict are being reframed. If we want to see truly inclusive, diverse, complex representations of queer people of colour we may have to look outside commercial cinema and television.

If we want to see queer films as a consistent body of work we LGBT people need to take control. There are hungry audiences wanting to see our queer stories; the growing numbers who flock to lesbian and gay film festivals worldwide are evidence of that. It is time for us to take up our cameras, and, like those pioneers before us, to refuse to accept no for an answer, and just go ahead and make the films we want to make by any means necessary.

1. Get your hands on equipment. Any equipment will do. Don't be fussy. Just practise your craft.
2. Read books. Can't afford them? – Borrow/Order them from your library.
3. Learn about your personal histories. Talk to your family. Get their stories.
4. Look beneath the collective lies from your own culture and background, and don't be afraid to be true to your own reality.
5. Don't compare yourself to other filmmakers. You are unique.
6. Learn about film history in the UK and around the world.
7. Get money from anyone you can. If you're not a good businessperson, find someone who is. If the (white) funders won't give you money, make your film anyway.
8. Get together an informal support network to give you feedback on your projects. The formal ones take too much time and effort.
9. Finish your film to the best quality you can afford.
10. Don't be put off if people find your work challenging and argue angrily with you. If you want to be popular, enter a beauty contest.
11. Show your film in festivals and at any event you can.
12. Audiences will be touched by your film, your story. Feel the warm reception. ■

Dental Examination

Sarah Salway

49

You're not real. I blink away
Joan Crawford, Audrey Hepburn,
but Katharine will keep hanging on
to the drill so when the dentist
asks for just a little wider,
is it any wonder I tense? It's like
this. The words are queuing up
in my mouth, and here comes
Elvis fitting in well with his white
jacket. There's a thump. I glimpse
the dental technician slump to the floor,
flat on her back, but I'm floating high.
See there. Marilyn is back with Arthur.
A lovely couple. And when did I turn
into my mother? So, on cue, my father
takes on the job, leaning over me, hands
on my chin as he lifts my mouth
to his. One sharp blink. Now the dentist
is telling me how it won't hurt
and I'm shouting he should keep
his room empty, that I won't carry on
while his nurse could be dead, what sort
of man is he? *Just a small prick*, he says,
to put you to sleep. Waking to the blood,
I adjust my skirt and leave the ceiling.

Feature Wall

Suraya Sidhu Singh

WHEN HE opened the door, she laughed, then took his head in her hands to examine it more closely, and kissed the corner of his jaw.

"Is it bad?" he said.

"Yes," she said, kissing him again. "But I can fix it."

He'd bought his clippers at the pound shop. They did the job in their own way, having cut a feature wall of stylised alopecia above his right ear that looked like a labyrinth game for children from the side of a cereal box.

She'd bought her clippers from her father's barber, a small dark man who smelled of lavender, talked socialist poets and, whilst keeping the particle board and formica of his real-life shop pristine, dreamed of chrome and red leather, checked linoleum and a peppermint twist pole. At university she'd made her drug money from a bedroom industry of punk haircutting.

In the bathroom, he removed his shirt. She laid out the components on a hand towel, oiled the blades and clicked in the comb.

He fingered the remaining combs, small numbers embossed just below the teeth, deducing. "Don't you think a Number One will be too short?"

"It'll have to be a Number One to fix *that*." Secretly, she was pleased

She toured his hair with her fingers, checking the weight and direction of growth. It was finer than it looked and the colour of nutmeg, growing in a whorl withershins from the crown, lying flat because the shafts grew along the scalp: a desirable tendency to avert The Hedgehog Effect. His skin was pale enough to show its underground of purple, blue and green; his shoulders were dusted with the freckles of a healthy, outdoorsy childhood. She had no freckles, having spent her childhood indoors reading, drawing pictures, watching incomprehensible black-and-white matinees and nurturing a resentment for all things healthy and outdoorsy.

She was 13 when a multiplex cinema opened in town, prompting a remarkable improvement in the population's access to the latest action blockbusters, Disney holiday features, and nauseating date movies starring Drew Barrymore.

And once a year there was a film festival that consisted of fewer than ten films documented in a two-fold monochrome leaflet, all of which contained either a) subtitles, b) homosexuality, and/or c) other subversions to be screened once only in off-peak hours.

Since it was well known that McDonalds and the skateboard park were the only appropriate

places to skip school - the park being popular with those seeking to engage in "kissing with tongues" - her attendance at the 10am showing of a Belgian documentary failed to provoke the suspicion of zealous, community-minded ticket-rippers.

She sat alone without popcorn or crisps. There were no advertisements for hairdressers or rest homes, no trailers for animated bible stories. Subtitles ceased to be a peculiarity in her cinema-going, although she had realised only recently that "films with subtitles" did not mean that the title had a second line, as in:

2001

A SPACE ODYSSEY

At each showing she would count five or six heads that broke the faint blue horizons made by rows of empty seats, thinking that the tickets sold would probably not pay to run the projector, let alone the projectionist. She craned her neck to peer into the small windows near the source of the stream of dusty light, wondering if projectionists still existed. The word itself sounded as obsolete as stenographer, spurrier, falconer. When she saw movement in the space beyond the glass she hoped for ghosts.

Of all the lonely film-going experiences of her adolescence, two were most formative in her psychosexual development: *Seven Years in Tibet* and *Romper Stomper*. Her fantasies were of neo-Nazis and Buddhist monks. She imagined watching them suck and fuck each other in a flurry of saffron robes, confederate flags, sandals, white Y-fronts, neem beads and cherry Doc Marten boots to a soundtrack of prayer bells and Oi! Oi! Oi! She was unconcerned as to whether their philosophies might line up, finding religion and fascism equally vile. She imagined touching them and them touching her, but most of all she imagined her fingers discovering the freshly-shaven hairline, a nape of sailrope-taut tendons and the secret vertices of naked triangles behind ears.

She began shaving her own head out of aesthetic reverence.

Slices of hair rained on his shoulders, collar- and cheek-bones. She blended the patchiness in as best she could, stopped, checked, touched up, stopped, checked, touched up, stopped. She polished the shavings from his body with a towel and swept the floor, then joined him in the shower.

Skated by water, hair and soap, she felt the shape of the bones of his skull in velveteen, and tasted the sweat and fresh water on his throat.

She had knelt down, blinded by water, cock at the threshold of her mouth, when he blurted out,

"I have to go."

She fell back on her haunches, laughing, clearing the water from her eyes. "What?"

He was already shutting off the taps, climbing from the tub and fumbling for his glasses. "I have to go – I'm sorry – I forgot."

"Where?"

"Work."

"It's nearly midnight."

He rubbed himself down hurriedly. When she climbed out of the bath he rubbed her down, too. "You can come with me. It won't take long."

Outside was cold. It was a Monday night; the town was all but deserted. The late-night café was empty but still frocked in party bulbs, bass resounding through its front window. A punk kid in the doorway of a second-hand bookshop begged spare change between sucks from a wine bladder. She recognised one of the patches holding his trousers together; it read, *FUCK RACISM*.

In combination with self-styled anarchist regalia, her shaven head rapidly gleaned the attention of the town's only recognisable subculture, known amongst themselves as *The Fourth Reich*. One of their younger, spottier plebs had approached her and asked what her patches meant. She replied, "If you don't know what *FUCK RACISM* means, you're as stupid as you look," feeling the pang of anticipatory fear as he calmly turned and walked away.

Several days later, after a late screening of *J'embrasse Pas*, she was unlocking her bicycle when a rusty turquoise Vauxhall pulled up. The occupants got out and exchanged dogmatic vulgarities. Before they'd pointlessly slammed the car doors that no longer latched, she'd dropped her bike and sprinted.

She had an intimate knowledge of the alleys and carparks that warren'd behind the shops and tower blocks, although perhaps better for locating places to drink cartons of wine and talk revolution strategy than for evading a gang of skinheads.

Something small and metal lying on the ground stopped her in the end. She skied on her forearms into a bloody crumple against a block wall. They stood above her and laughed, discussed raping her, decided she was too ugly, and settled for liberating her boots, gave her some boots of their own, then pissed all over her. It burned.

FUCK RACISM washed out with the skinhead piss; she knew it would. She lost the will to keep shaving her head and bought a red bandana to tame the hedgehog. Several weeks later she found herself once again sprinting full tilt through the

same alleyways, pursued by a different coterie of local imitators. Something to do with the colour of the bandana. It was that kind of town.

She crunched the ice coating the puddles with her everything-proof soles as he fumbled for keys, followed as he scampered up an exterior stairwell to an unmarked door.

Inside was warm, dry and dimly lit. She kept her scarf and gloves on and waited for the sensation to return to her face. It was a long, narrow room with a low ceiling and walls that sheered off at strange angles. Along one wall three tall machines hummed gently. Each bore an array of coloured buttons on one side, and on the other – a shelf of platters.

He was rushing about the room, fetching and carrying things, reading and writing observations on a clipboard, mumbling to himself. Eventually he came to a standstill, counted seconds on his watch, then pushed the green button. The machine clacked to life, spewing a funnel of light from one end. The platters spun. She felt movement, turned and saw behind her black tape whizzing between a series of pulleys. She could make out small holes on its edges and a myriad of pale horizontal lines. The machine was sending its light through a small window. He was standing by another small window, staring out.

She began, in a cathedral-whisper, "This is a..."

"Yes," he said.

She joined him by the small window, gazing at the titles on the screen. A scattering of heads broke the faint blue horizons below.

"Test screening," he said, and shut the lights in the warm, low-ceilinged room.

They made love on a desk-top with punctilious cue-marking instructions stuck to it.

About to come, she found herself looking through the little windows at an image on the screen, incredulous at first, as though her mind had manufactured something impossible: a skin-head, covered in scars and tattoos, dressed in a ladies' silk petticoat, fumbling about in a drawer of knickers, masturbating furiously. ■

18 January 2006 > The Internet Movie Database > Films (484,384) > Gay (565) > 1940s (5) 1950s (6) 1960s (5) 1970s (4) 1980s (5) Actor (4) Adultery (9) Affair (6) AIDS (34) Alcohol (4) Anal Sex (9) Apartment (7) Arrest (7) Art (4) Art Film (4) Artist (7) Asian (4) Aspiring Musician (4) Audience (3) Audition (4) Baby (8) Band (4) Bar (5) Based On Book (7) Based On Novel (21) Based On Play (18) Based On True Story (8) Bathtub Scene (8) Beach (13) Best Friend (5) Best Friends (5) Betrayal (5) Bible (4) Bicycle (4) Bigotry (6) Birthday (11) Birthday Party (4) Bisexual (32) Bisexuality (6) Black Comedy (13) Blackmail (3) Blood (5) Blow Job (5) Boarding School (5) Bondage (4) Bouncer (3) Boxing (6) Boy (11) Boyfriend (10) Boyfriend Boyfriend Relationship (5) Boyfriend Girlfriend Relationship (5) Break Up (4) Breasts (5) Brother Brother Relationship (5) Brother Sister Relationship (5) Bully (7) Bullying (5) Burial (3) Bus (4) Camp (4) Campy (4) Canada (5) Catholic (4) Catholic Priest (4) Catholicism (4) Celebrity (6) Cell Phone (3) Cemetery (3) Children (11) Christianity (4) Christmas (6) Church (6) Class (4) Class Differences (3) Classroom (4) Closeted Homosexual (29) Club (3) Cocaine (7) College (9) Comedian (5) Comedienne (4) Coming Of Age (27) Coming Out (75) Competition (5) Compilation (5) Concert (3) Controversial (9) Conversion Therapy (6) Cooking (4) Couch (3) Courtroom (5) Cross Dressing (5) Cruising (4) Crush (3) Crying (4) Cult Favorite (4) Cybersex (4) Dance (7) Dancer (4) Dancing (8) Dating (12) Death (19) Depression (4) Dildo (5) Disco (3) Discrimination (5) Divorce (4) Doctor (4) Dog (7) Dormitory (5) Drag (16) Drag Queen (14) Dream Sequence (5) Drug Abuse (6) Drug Dealing (4) Drugs (19) Drunk (4) Dysfunctional Family (4) Education (3) Educational (4) England (3) Erotic (7) Erotica (6) Experimental Film (12) Family (33) Family Relationships (6) Fashion (6) Father (8) Father Daughter Relationship (6) Father Son Relationship (27) Female Frontal Nudity (5) Female Nudity (13) Fight (4) Film In Film (3) Film Making (6) First Gay Sexual Experience (17) First Love (4) Flashback Sequence (10) Friend (9) Friends (9) Friendship (33) Friendship Between Boys (6) Funeral (5) Garden (3) Gay 70s (3) Gay Activism (6) Gay Adoption (3) Gay Asian (7) Gay Athlete (5) Gay Bar (14) Gay Bashing (9) Gay Character (4) Gay Club (3) Gay Couple (9) Gay Football Player (3) Gay For Pay (3) Gay Friend (13) Gay Interest (38) Gay Kiss (33) Gay Latino (5) Gay Lead Character (4) Gay Love (7) Gay Marriage (9) Gay Parade (5) Gay Parent (9) Gay Pride (3) Gay Relationship (8) Gay Rights (11) Gay Sex (22) Gay Slur (12) Gay Soldier (3) Gay Son (8) Gay Stereotype (7) Gay Straight Relations (6) Gay Teenager (57) Gender (4) Germany (4) Girlfriend (8) Gore (3) Gossip (5) Guitar (3) Gun (7) Gunplay (3) Handcuffs (4) Hardcore (8) Hate Crime (4) Heterosexuality (7) High School (16) High School Friends (6) HIV (8) HIV Positive (9) Hollywood (6) Home Movie (4) Homoerotic (9) Homoeroticism (6) Homophobia (40) Homophobic (5) Homosexual (168) Homosexual History (5) Homosexual Jock (4) Homosexual Love (6) Homosexual Scene (4) Homosexual Teenager (11) Homosexuality (48) Hospital (14) Hostage (4) Hotel (7) Housewife (3) Human Relationship (8) Human Rights (4) Husband Wife Relationship (9) Hustler (12) Hypocrisy (4) Illness (4) Immigrant (5) Immigration (5) Impersonation (3) Imprisonment (3) Incest (6) Independent Film (98) Infidelity (10) Interracial Relationship (8) Interview (10) Israel (4) Jealousy (5) Karaoke (6) Kidnapping (5) Kiss (6) Kissing (4) Kitchen Scene (3) Lawyer (6) Lesbian (73) Lesbian Interest (4) Lesbian Kiss (8) Lesbian Scene (4) Letter (4) Literature (4) Loneliness (4) Los Angeles California (5) Loss Of Father (4) Love (30) Mafia (4) Makeover (7) Male Dancer (6) Male Female Relationship (5) Male Frontal Nudity (19) Male Full Frontal Nudity (4) Male Nudity (23) Male Prostitute (20) Male Prostitution (8) Marijuana (8) Marriage (20) Massage (5) Masturbation (9) Masturbation Scene (20) Mistaken Identity (4) Money (6) Mother (7) Mother Daughter Relationship (9) Mother Son Relationship (19) Motorcycle (7) Movie Star (3) Murder (22) Music (13) Musical (7) Musician (8) M nage   Trois (11) Narration (4) Neighbor (4) Nerd (3) Nervous Breakdown (3) New York (11) New York City (14) Nightclub (8) Non Fiction (4) Nudity (33) Obesity (4) Older Man Younger Man (9) One Night Stand (7) Opera Singer (3) Party (8) Pedophile (6) Photograph (4) Photographer (5) Piano (3) Playwright (3) Police (16) Policeman (9) Political (9) Politics (7) Porn (3) Pornography (9) Pot Smoking (5) Prayer (3) Pregnancy (9) Pregnant (5) Prejudice (8) Premarital Sex (3) Priest (4) Prison (7) Profanity (5) Professor (4) Prostitute (6) Prostitution (5) Queer (18) Racial Slur (5) Racism (5) Rain (4) Rape (14) Rejection (4) Relationship (12) Religion (14) Restaurant (5) Reunion (4) Revenge (6) Road (5) Robbery (6) Romance (12) Romantic Comedy (4) Roommate (5) Rugby (3) S&M (4) Sadomasochism (7) Sailor (3) Same Sex Situation (4) San Francisco California (5) Satire (6) School (10) Schoolboy Crush (6) Secret (8) Seduction (5) Sequel (8) Serial Killer (5) Sex (68) Sex Scene (3) Sexual (4) Sexuality (34) Sexy Pinay (10) Shower Scene (11) Singer (5) Single Mother (7) Sister (5) Sketch Comedy (3) Small Town (10) Smoking (5) Snow (3) Soldier (4) Son (4) Spain (5) Spoof (8) Stand Up (3) Stand Up Comedian (3) Stand Up Comedy (5) Straight (4) Strip Club (3) Student (6) Stupidity (3) Style (3) Suicide (16) Suicide Attempt (6) Supermarket (5) Surreal (5) Swimming Pool (8) Talk To Camera (5) Teacher (11) Teacher Student Relationship (4) Teen (32) Teenage Boy (4) Teenager (15) Telephone (3) Television (8) Theater (5) Theft (4) Title Spoken By Character (10) Torture (4) Tragedy (3) Train (4) Transgender (13) Transsexual (5) Transvestism (9) Transvestite (11) Trial (4) Twist In The End (4) Unrequited Love (15) Unsafe Sex (4) Urban (4) Urination Scene (6) Vacation (4) Video Camera (5) Violence (16) Vomit (6) Vulgarity (6) War (4) Wedding (13) Weight Loss (3) Women (4) WWII (5) Young Love (10) Youth (87) Zombie (3)

Making Dracula

Jay Merrill

PreText

Two men from the video shop hold a bony little guy against a wall.

You can't get away Mate, one of them says.

Okay, okay, says the guy, shrinking back from the glare of a street light. *So it was a mistake. Cool down, won't you*. His hands fumble with a shabby wallet taken from his pocket. The hands shake.

Now, get out of here, the other one tells him, taking hold of the money.

And don't come back, you scummy bastard.

The bony guy leaps like a rabbit that's seen a sudden bolthole. But will they really let him go? Kohl-rimmed whitened eyes, mouth of mucus red all a shiver. Will they? He skulks off, finds shadow, feels humiliated. For these terrors and tremblings he'll make somebody pay.

Dialogue

Thick yellow fog, dense, obscuring things. Feels total, feels like a somewhere you'll never get out of. Feels forever as a lost world. But he's at home in the twilight, his tongue licks the lostness into shape in his mouth. It comes out as words. - *We can't go on*. - He casts his eyes down now, low, as if suffering. Wow. He hasn't tasted anything as good since..... - *Hwaar* - His sigh coming out like a painful breath - his own personal reconstruction of the sound of sorrow. *I just don't feel the right way about you*. Said tenderly for maximum knife-twisting effect, pain and regret, all the sort of stuff he wants to bring out here. Because he's a decent guy. There's a pause as he thinks through the part of a hesitating decent guy. Then he goes in for the kill. Sincerity precedes polish, he squeezes up his lips into a puckered moue. It's a fucking piss-take.

And you. If you're truthful - he goes - *you'll admit you don't feel right about me either. M I correct?* He asks this gravely, experimenting with fatherliness, as he tastes the sense of failure, the impotence, conjured up by the words. As he tastes the sense of loss.

And from across the table he hears Debbie sigh, too. - *Hwooh*

How come he knew he'd reach her with this sincere patter. Just the thought of sincerity makes him want to puke and fall about at the same time. It makes him cringe.

Silence for a bit, then she says, *I spouse you're right*.

Acquiescence, wow. His heart's pounding with joy. Fuck, what a taste, what a glory, what a complete piss-take.

I have tried, I really have, but you see it's so

difficult when.....

What the fuck? He resents her tone of voice, reasonable, and there's this almost crisp efficiency. He's not fucking having it. No, no, it's a bit of blood he wants. Blood. Pure and simple. Just that. The taste of it. Who's she to come out with this voice of reason? *Shit!* he bursts in acidly with. It's a matter of feeling. It doesn't work. End of story, cut the crap. Fuck her detailed explanations. Drooling heavily at the wobbling tits of the passing waitress. To show Debbie a thing or two, he rides roughshod across her last remaining vanity. If it is Debbie. He can't be expected to remember.

We're not compatible. He spits the words out angry endgame style.

Characterisation

A punch into air, doesn't want to hear one word more. End! End of story, end of the line. End of everything. Feels restless irritation, lights a fag, puffs out into heavy smoky atmosphere. Calms down somewhat when he sees this tear on Debbie's cheek. Or someone's cheek. Any cheek will do for this tear. Tear glistening through fog. Yes, calmer.

We can remain friends I hope, he says, successful. He's wrested the role of reasonable one away from her. It's fucking *his*. His role! She's sposed to grovel and beg. That's the part she should be playing. And he gives a round and amiable chuckle, though to say, though to say, *Course we will*. Him being him being blokey.

I, er, I don't know. I... What do you think? Debbie's voice has turned self doubting, weak; he's made her feel dull and unsexy and she hates herself because it matters.

Whatever you like, he goes. Mister Patronising. *Whatever's easiest for you*.

He's taken on the style of a judge summing up now, sitting squarely in his chair and enjoying the lostness in her eyes, all the ruined confidence. He sits squarely, his heart's a tiny mechanism racing, even dancing. Self-love, valid appreciation of his own astuteness, he's extracting a bit of emotion out of all this and it's a thrill, a blissful excursion. Sweet agony of her pain for him to feed off. Oh, wow, he's close to ecstasy. Eeeeeee. The joy of it.

What d'you mean "friends"? this Debbie unexpectedly asks him, and his eyes go black. He yawns. Maybe he'll fuck her some time if she's nice to him, but not now, no. He looks at his watch. Shit, it's nearly morning. He hates this bitch, whatever her fucking name is. All sour-breath, questions and desperate eyes.

I gotta go.

Location

The driver of the night-bus won't accept his out-of-date pass. He rifles through his pockets for the fare. The eyes of the other passengers all glare at him with hatred for holding things up. He slinks to the back of the bus and sits in a trembling rage, sits huddled all the way to his stop. *Fuck bastard*, he mumbles to the smeared window through which he can see nothing except a trickle of water down the glass. Rain. Rain.

UnderText

Back in his favourite club, narrow beady eyes of him, fixed on the rump of the waitress. Fixed. Sharp animal stare of his which definitely says, *I'm gonna eat you*. His gaze riding with her, in all her undulations across the tables. Him right there, eyes of a ferret, thinking himself a rare killer of hearts, or at least a breaker. Keeps saying under his meaty stinky breath how he'd bloody bite into em, tear em up, toss em out and leave em for dead. What else would you do with hearts? The arse of the waitress, the focus for his bitter dreams.

Ere, he says.

He's one of those musicians nobody can place. It's always said about him though, *Ya know, Eee used to play with, er...* which is something to get by on in the circles he moves in, esp. *with les bitches*. What he's up to mostly is just teaching all the dumb little bimbos he can lay that he's free and they can't own him, and he likes a bit of a struggle before their necks flop soft. And there's always plenty of candidates for the part assigned them. It's ferrety tyrant time down at the club. It's him doing the assigning.

Ere, he goes to the waitress, assertive little heartbreaker.

As he holds up his glass for a refill, his eyes puffed out with this notion he has of himself as hero, priest and fool, and bad-man. *Ere*. He's dreaming how when the waitress goes into the ladies' room he'll slip through the door darkly. Like a shadow. Before she can speak, he'll place his hand sideways between her legs, poke into her cunt with fingers, teeth and cock. So he dreams on. Dreams the smell of her crevices, her sap and inner red.

We're closing, the waitress says, coldly, both eyes and mouth falling sideways in dislike. And he trots out surreptitiously with no murmur of dissent.

Structure

You're seeing her! Emma's mouth draws in tight with hurt. He looks in some disdain at her softfat body, and gives her a smile that's ferretlike, tiger-toothed.

You're getting too clingy, he accuses, pulling on his trousers, running up the zip with taunting emphasis.

I'm entitled to know what's going on.

He's furious, and at the same time slick with power.

You want me to hit you, he informs her, drawing on mainstream dialogue themes.

Malice pleasure flicks across his mouth. He sees these delicious movie clips of himself tying her down and piercing her with a sharp instrument, overriding her will. *His* is the will that matters. He wants her to goad him and cry and plead for mercy, which he will not give. It goes without saying, he will not. It'd be cool to beat her to a pulp and then fuck her. If he could be bothered. If he really had the energy to use her up and defy her and overcome her.

Oh, fuck yourself, he suddenly says, wanting to fade away as mist through the gap under the door.

You're a pervy bastard, Emma shouts, and a bit of pre-ejac seeps out of him, unexpectedly.

Yeah. That's more like it. He's getting a bit of a buzz from the accusation, and it's almost making him feel like staying to put his punishment into effect. But he pulls on his coat anyway, saunters to the door, says, *Ring me*. It's cooler, this is a re-re-make, after all; it's what's in the current script. He goes swaggering down the stairway without emotion, but in the street sees sun glinting in the gap between two blocks of flats. *This* makes him run, his sharp little body hunching forward, his squinting eyes kept low. Must get home.

Hey you, a voice booms so close to his ear he quivers like a whipped dog, as he tries to steep himself in darkest shadow. This sudden fucking light blazes full into his red-rimmed eyes highlighting the bloodshot mess of them, making him wince.

I'm talking to you, the voice sneers. *Christ, you're in a state, man. What you on?*

He tries giving a quaking smile of appeasement to get himself out of this, but can't seem to stop it coming out as a smirk. There's the anxiety of getting it right. They make him keep on re-doing it, they've got to get the whole thing right.

Nothing, he blurts out at last, apologetic, shoulders hunched, even aware himself of his own sad image.

Get outa here. Get home, The policeman barks, and he, a wretched little wafer of an anti-hero, slips off wordless into the maze of flats which rise before him like gigantic tombstones. His POV.

Plot

We can remain friends, he goes blandly to Debbie, Emma, Sue, whoever, but his eyes, of course, are somewhere else. He's saying inwardly - What a line, a laugh, a piss-take - as their faces fade away like soap bubbles, smack, smack, smack. No shortage of bimbo replacements. He's Mister Popular with a vengeance. Always that.

Used to play with, er, whassat band, ya know - does him a few favours, good image and that. Pouncing and puncturing, taking such trophies as occur. Say, he might drag an earring from the earlobe of his lay, she'll scream, the whore; there'll be bloody traces over the gold. Fantasy of his. He drinks it in, image sticks with him. Nah, he being a *musician like*, has no trouble scoring. Drama of the coming dawn, he's streaking home, all no-emotion, Gothic grey intensity of the visuals; the music pounds.

UnderText 2

Ere - Hero in the night café, rat-arsed by now, lad to the last. See in his eye how he dubs himself king of all he touches - these softminded women he favours are wanting to win, or at least to not be lost, so they're giving in entirely to his self-delusions. A good fuck. (Only good?) Shit no, he's the best fucking fuck. Truth is, they'd pay any price for such a fuck as he can give em. Gagging for im. He and the latest lay in bed; it's wild. And he'll be telling her he's a superstar, not wanting to leave out any of the superlatives from his self-identity. Unowned and free and brilliant, and he has the best cock plus enchantment going for him - oh, yes. Plenty of that commodity, and evil. He has evil going for him. He's a magic-man, and, he's even imperfect - in the most flattering and desirable way of being so that ever was *a course* - only thing he lacks is modesty, only other thing he lacks is a brain, only other, other, other, other... Yawn.

Anyway, governed by mists and hotnight flushes, he's put in charge of the movie mags, where he finds he's already been entered big time. He's listed as hero and anti-hero in as many ways as can be thought of, covering his arse on all sides. And they're still asking for him, asking for more.

Action

New grey night, he struts in the town. Having taken on board what's called charm, for the intention of scoring with a bimbo, he slides by, serene. In his fox's hat, sleek winsome trill to that voice of his, and with a heady smell. Overpowering animal going for the kill. He'll tear your heart out even when he doesn't mean to eat you, being fond of sport. In the chippie he sneaks a curry sauce meant for the guys in front.

You sad fucker, they say to him. *You're a dead man if you ever come back here.*

He's legged it before they've expressed even a quarter of their disgust.

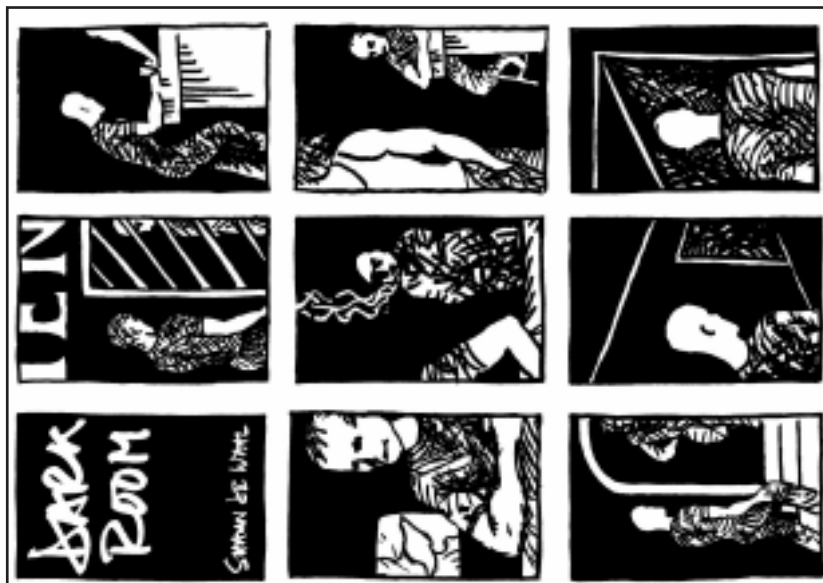
Denouement

It's getting early, he's starting to lose the sense of things, starting to droop and that. This is what always happens. It has to be written into the script this way. It's at the core of his self-identity. There wouldn't even be a Dracula without this built-in terror of the dawn. Even so, they're not about to let him be. Katie phones him and says regretfully, *Is it really over?* Her voice half-swallowed by the choke-up in her throat. *But I love you.* To cut things short, he tells her she's shit in bed. And it's true to say she's quickly shamed and then can't speak at all. She's further stymied by the truckloads of self-loathing she's releasing, because, ridiculously, even though he's a horror story, she finds herself wanting to apologise. It's so crap and corny, but she keeps getting pulled in that direction. She's frustrated, can't think of anything better to say than *sorry*. Tears come. The moist sound of her sorrow brings him to a bit, makes him pant a bit. There's the smell of blood in it. *Blood.* A reviving thing. He'd like to lick it out of her, drop by glistening drop, and this is the closest he'll come to feeling life as we know it, of feeling emotion of any kind. As *she* droops *he* strengthens, dead-and-alive devil that he is.

But I love you. Oh piss-take. Who writes these things?

Anyhow, it's getting early, he's got to take cover, he's coming over groggy, feels the need. Streak of light in the sky and all that. Oh, shit. Needs to get back, fuck, fuck everything, what a life, eh, he's shattered, to say the least. Get home, get to sleep, be out for the count till nightfall. Start again. ■

56



Chroma: Biographies

Inge Blackman is a writer, director, producer, and cameraperson. She has recently completed *Legacy* for the Arnolfini in Bristol, exploring the lasting impact of slavery on Black families. She is currently in post-production with *Fem*, an experimental short on queer femininity. Other credits include *BD Women*, *Viva Tabatha*, and *Paradise Lost*, an autobiographical journey to Trinidad.

Diana Cockrill was born in Cambridge more years ago than she cares to think about. She is a divorced bisexual pensioner, out to her friends for the last six years, and currently occupying herself by reading for an honours degree in English and French at the University of Northampton.

Nir Cohen was born in Tel Aviv and lives in London. He is completing his PhD thesis on gay narratives in contemporary Israeli Cinema at University College London.

John Dixon has won a short story prize (Bridport) and has had several poems published. He has completed two novels and is working on a third.

Gaz studied at Harrow's Art College, and at 19 learnt his trade assisting on shoots for Guinness. Now known for his male portraiture and gay magazine covers, his work has been published worldwide. Last year he was very proud to shoot campaigns for the Terrence Higgins Trust.

Radcliff Gregory is a Leicester-based writer who has written three volumes of poetry and been widely anthologised elsewhere. He also writes non-fiction articles and essays on LGBT, gender, identity and disability issues, in addition to arts biography and literary criticism. Radcliff gives regular poetry readings and public lectures.

Paul Hartnett has spent almost 30 years documenting midnight's children and their club culture. His photography has been published internationally and exhibited in London, New York and Tokyo. Under the name of P-P Hartnett, he's had four novels, a book of short stories and - as editor - three anthologies published. He lives alone in a terraced house on a hill in Colne, East Lancashire. See more at paulhartnett.com.

Marc Holland was born in Ipswich in 1970 and now lives in the Midlands. He started writing in 2003 and has had some short stories published in America. His first novel, *Mark Stone: Secret Agent*, will be published by Starbooks Press in the USA in September 2006.

Michael Hyde lives in London.

VG Lee has published three novels: *The Comedienne*, *The Woman in Beige*, and the forthcoming *Diary of a Provincial Lesbian*. She also writes short stories, and most recently an essay for the Stonewall anthology, *The Way We Are Now*.

John McCullough's poetry has appeared in *The Rialto*, *The Guardian*, *Smiths Knoll*, *Reactions* and was the subject of a Showcase feature in *Magma*. He is the author of *Unplugged* at Café Atlantic (Waterloo, 2004) and *Cloudfish*, due out from Pighog Press in May 2006. He lives in Brighton.

Aoife Mannix is an Irish writer based in London. Her first poetry collection, *The Elephant in the Corner*, was published by Tall Lighthouse in 2005 (tall-lighthouse.co.uk). Her work has been published in various magazines - *Kin*, *In Our Own Words*, and *100 Poets Against the War*, amongst others - as well as on spoiledink.com/aofemannix.

Char March is an award-winning poet and playwright. Her credits include three collections of poetry, six BBC Radio 4 plays and seven stage plays. Her poetry and short fiction have been published widely in literary magazines and anthologies. Char is just finishing her first novel, set in Berlin and Leeds. She

grew up in Central Scotland and now divides her time between the Highlands and Yorkshire.

Jay Merill is published in recent and forthcoming issues of *Stand*, *The London Magazine*, *Tears in the Fence*, *Staple* (Alt Gen), *Myslexia*, *Cadenza*, *DreamCatcher*, *Texts' Bones*, *NightTrain* (USA), *Prophecy* (USA), etc. She had a dramatic monologue performed at the Lost Theatre One Act Festival in Fulham, and is currently working on a novel.

Maria Mojo is a queer femme who performs as Dyke Marilyn. She has a BA (Hons) in Philosophy & Applied Psychology. She is currently preparing for an MA in Gender Studies at UCL to further explore her A-grade thesis on identity, myth & psychoanalysis. She is fighting her addiction to Butches, and can also be found at dykemarilyn.com.

Sharon Morris studied fine art at the Slade School, where she currently teaches. She has exhibited photography, film, and video installations. Her academic publications include an essay on Claude Cahun in *The Bisexual Imaginary* (Cassell, 1997). *False Spring*, her first poetry collection, will be published by Enitharmon in 2007.

Uriel Orlow is a Swiss artist and writer based in London. He uses video, sound, photography, billboard-posters, text and drawing in his work. Central to the form and content of much of his work is the archive and the artist as archivist and mediator. He has exhibited in international solo and group exhibitions and his films have been screened at film festivals. A monograph on his body of work, *Deposits*, will be published by Greenbox in 2006. More info at urielorlow.net.

Drew Payne lives and works in London. His work has been published in the anthologies *Don't Judge This Book By It's Cover*, *Telling Tales*, and *Courage To Love*. He has been published in *ScotsGay*, *Nursing Standard*, *Velvet Mafia* and *Whotopia*, and is a regular contributor to *FS Magazine*, a London Men's Health magazine.

Sarah Pucill completed her MA at the Slade in 1990. Her 16mm films have won awards at key international festivals. Her work has also been screened at the ICA, Tate, Barbican, and the Serpentine Galleries. Her photographs have been collected by Charles Saatchi and were recently included in *IRIS's Masquerade: Women's Contemporary Portrait Photography* book and exhibition at Photofusion Gallery. She is making a 45-minute 16mm film with her mother.

Tim Robertson lives in central London with his partner, Neil, and works as a consultant in children's services and the arts. He is a trustee of Create Arts (createarts.org.uk) and on the editorial team of *Magma* poetry magazine (magma-poetry.com). He studies film music as a hobby.

David Rothwell has a reputation for being a master fantasy image manipulator and a flawless portrait photographer. His talents have been called upon to transform, redress, mutate or glorify the human form. His work ranges from magazine covers and software packaging to private portraits, from artistic statements to science fiction masterpieces. See more at davidrothwell.com

Sarah Salway's latest book, *Messages* (Bluechrome), is a collaboration with the poet, Lynne Rees, and consists of 300 pieces of 300 words. Her novel, *Something Beginning With*, is published by Bloomsbury. See more at sarahsalway.com

Robert Seatter published his debut collection, *Travelling to the Fish Orchards* (Seren) in 2002, following inclusion in *Anvil New Poets 3* (2000). A new collection, *On the Beach with Chet Baker* (also Seren) follows at the end of 2006. He has won the National Poetry Competition, London Poetry, Forward Poetry Prize, *Tabla*, and *Housman Poetry Prize*. His work has appeared in varied publications and magazines, as well as on TV and radio.

Sina Shamsavari is a graphic artist whose work explores the boundaries between fantasy and reality. Sina burst onto the underground queer punk scene at the age of 16 with the queer comix-zines *Concerned Muthers* and *BoyCrazyBoy*. Contact him at sinasham@gmail.com or through his website: boycrazyboy.com

Suraya Sidhu Singh is a New Zealander living in London. She was the winner of the 2004 BBC Radio 3 summer writing competition and has appeared in journals in the UK (*Naked Punch*), Sweden (*Serum*, *Fabrik*) and New Zealand (*JAAM*, *Takehe*). She likes vegetarian sushi and sleeping on trains.

Mima Simic is a Croatian writer. She will write for food.

Andra Simons was born and raised in Bermuda. He is an actor, director, and writer now living in London. He has published and performed his poetry in Bermuda, the Caribbean, Canada, and the UK. He is a recipient of both the Bermuda Gold Award and the Golden Inkwell for his poetry and plays.

Cherry Smyth's debut poetry collection, *When the Lights Go Up*, was published by Lagan Press, 2001. A pamphlet, *The Future of Something Delicate*, was published by Smith/Doorstop in 2005. Her stories have appeared in several anthologies including *Scéalta: Short Stories by Irish Women* (Telegram, 2006). She lives in London.

Del LaGrace Volcano is gender variant visual artist who has continuously produced and performed queer cultural material, including, but not limited to, texts, photographs, films

and videos for the past two decades and who's work has been instrumental in the development of queer theory. Herm's monographs include *The Drag King Book* (with Judith Halberstam), *Sublime Mutations*, and *Sex Works*. Del's next book (with Ulrika Dahl) *Femmes of Power: Exploring Queer Femininities* will be published by Serpent's Tail in 2007.

Shaun de Waal was literary editor of South Africa's *Mail & Guardian* newspaper from 1991 to 2005 and chief film critic since 1998. His fiction appears in journals and anthologies, as well as in book form (*These Things Happen*, 1996). His graphic novelette, *Jackmarks*, was published in 1998. A new collection is due out in 2006. He won the Sanlam Award for his fiction and the Thomas Pringle Award (twice) for his criticism.

Robin Whitmore's drawing practice uses sound and video to illustrate other people's anecdotes. The images included are from the *Galway Film Fleadh* last summer when he was artist-in-residence at the *Galway Art Centre*. He will be designing this year's *Duckie Euro Shame* at the *Hackney Empire* in July.

River Wolton's poems have recently appeared in *Mslexia*, *Lancaster LitFest Anthology* and *Red Pepper*. She teaches creative and reflective writing in schools, sings with the lesbian acapella group *Deep C Divas*, and performs with the Yorkshire-based *Five Women Poets with a Kick*.

58



CIRKUS

By Patti Frazee
Published by
Alyson Books
£15.99, 1555839355
Distributed by
Turnaround

An astonishing debut novel, where enchantment and illusion mingle with reality as the Borefsky Brothers Circus makes its way across the 1900 American Midwest. The closely guarded histories of the troupe of performers interweave until a love affair between two of the female performers shifts their reality forever.

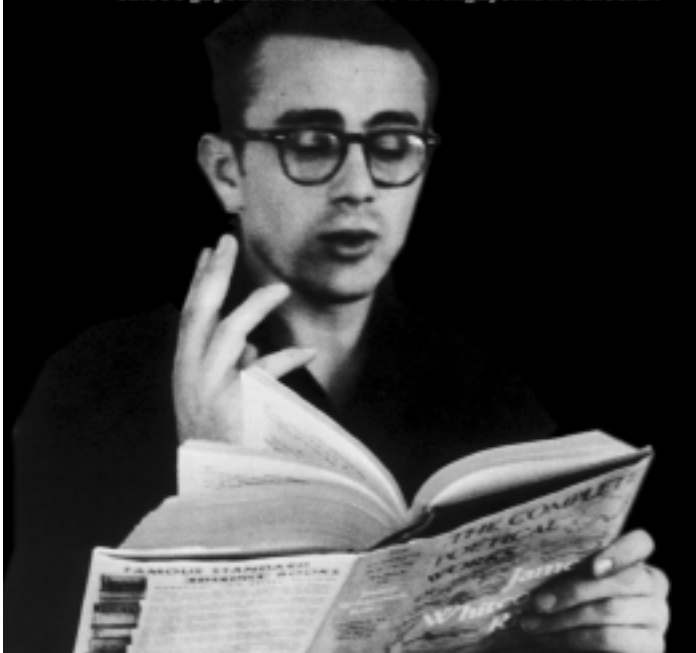
This title is distributed by **Turnaround**, one of the UK's leading suppliers of original and independently-published gay and lesbian books.

turnaround-uk.com

Gay's The Word

LESBIAN AND GAY BOOKSHOP

Gay's The Word Bookshop
66 Marchmont Street London WC1N 1AB Tube: Russell Square
Mon-Sat 10am-6.30pm Sun 2pm-6pm Tel 0207 278 7654
sales@gaystheword.co.uk / www.gaystheword.co.uk



Chroma

International Queer Writing Competition
a short story and poetry competition
for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans writers

judges

poetry: Mark Doty

short story: Ali Smith and Michael Arditti

prizes in both categories

1st prize £300, 2nd prize £150, 3rd prize £75
and publication in Chroma

deadline: 10 September 2006

Rules:

Stories on any subject, in any style, up to 5000 words. Poems on any subject, in any style, up to 50 lines.

Entries must be the work of the entrant and must never have been published (including the internet) or broadcast.

The entry fee is £5 for each poem or story submitted, payable in £ by cheque, postal order or cash. Cheques must be from a UK bank and made payable to Queer Writers and Poets with the sender's name and address on the back.

Entries from outside the UK can only be paid in cash (notes only) or by cheque from a UK bank: US\$10 or •10 per entry.

Entries must be sent to Chroma Writing Competition, PO Box 44655, London N16 0WQ, England.

Entries must be in English, typed, single-sided, with pages numbered and stapled. Stories must be double-spaced, and poems ^ single-spaced.

All work will be judged anonymously. Name, address and story title must appear on a separate cover letter, not on the entry itself. Entries will not be returned. No corrections after receipt, nor refunds.

For acknowledgement of your entry, please enclose a stamped addressed postcard marked Acknowledgement. Prizewinners will be announced before 15 October 2006, and winners names will be posted onto the Chroma website.

Worldwide copyright of each entry remains with the author, but *Chroma: A Queer Literary Journal* will have the right to publish the winning poems and stories in the journal.

No competitor may win more than one prize in each category. The judges' decision is final and no individual correspondence can be entered into.

Entry implies acceptance of all the rules.

Failure to comply with the entry requirements will result in disqualification.

Critiques: enclose a further £10 per story/poem (and SAE) if you require a critique of your work. Please write "Critique Required" at the top of the story and ensure correct postage on your entry.

Write Out in the Open

A Creative Writing Residential for Queer Writers
3-9 September at Maison Lahon in France
with Shaun Levin



Whether you're plotting or shaping your novel, writing short stories, looking for ways to jump-start your writing, or just want to experiment with new ways of writing, **Write Out in the Open** will boost your confidence, inspire your prose, and help you deal with writers block.

The focus will be on developing fresh ideas and setting new writing goals. The week is designed to give you time, space and an environment in which to create, read, and discuss your writing with other writers. Maison Lahon is situated in the peaceful hamlet of Mouhous, twenty minutes north of Pau airport and 40 minutes from the Pyrenees.

Places are limited to 8 participants (participants will have their own double room). The workshop is open to all lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans writers. Non-participating partners are welcome.

What's included: transfers from Pau airport/train station. Tuition. All meals: continental breakfast, light lunch, 3 or 4 course evening meal, wine with meals. Swimming pool.

Cost: £520 per person per week (non-participating, £420)

More details at shaunlevin.com

What's for Dinner?

A Poetry Workshop with
Saradha Soobrayen

Poetry and food nourishes our souls and reflects our personal tastes and histories.
A 5-week course devised to give new poets the basic ingredients for writing poetry and feeding the poetic process.

When: Mondays, 3-31 July, 7-9 pm

Where: BT Studio, Poetry Café, Covent Garden, London
Book through spreadtheword.org.uk

For more details about workshops for poets and writers and one-to-one feedback sessions with Saradha email: poetsandwritersforum@yahoo.co.uk

And he'll be telling her he's a superstar, not wanting to leave out any of the superlatives from his self-identity. Unowned and free and brilliant, and he has the best cock plus enchantment going for him – oh, yes. Plenty of that commodity, and evil. He has evil going for him. He's a magic-man, and, he's even imperfect – in the most flattering and desirable way of being so that ever was a course – only thing he lacks is modesty, only other thing he lacks is a brain, only other, other, other, other, other... Yawn.

Anyway, governed by mists and hotnight flushes, he's put in charge of the movie mags, where he finds he's already been entered big time. He's listed as hero and anti-hero in as many ways as can be thought of, covering his arse on all sides. And they're still asking for him, asking for more.

(from Jay Merrill's "Making Dracula")

**Inge Blackman
Diana Cockrill
Nir Cohen
John Dixon
Radcliff Gregory
Paul Hartnett
Marc Holland
Michael Hyde
VG Lee
John McCullough
Aoife Mannix
Char March
Jay Merrill
Maria Mojo
Sharon Morris
Uriel Orlow
Drew Payne
Sarah Pucill
Tim Robertson
David Rothwell
Sarah Salway
Robert Seatter
Sina Shamsavari
Suraya Sidhu Singh
Mima Simic
Andra Simons
Cherry Smyth
Del LaGrace Volcano
Robin Whitmore
Shaun de Waal
River Wolton**

